

A
D I S S E R T A T I O N
U P O N
H E R E T I C A L O P I N I O N S,
G I V I N G

A short distinctive View of the principal Errors,
WHICH HAVE PREVAILED

In all the several Ages of the CHURCH,

A N D S H E W I N G

That these are no reasonable Objections against the *Truth*
of Christianity, nor any Grounds for the false Pretences
of *Popery*, or *Infidelity*.

By JOHN RAWLINS, A. M.

Rector of *Leigh* in *Worcestershire*, Minister of *Badsey* and *Wick-*
amford, and Chaplain to the Right Hon. Lord ARCHER.

Periculosum nobis admodum, atque etiam miserabile est, tot nunc Fides, existere, quot
Voluntates, et tot nobis Doctrinas esse, quot Mores, et tot Causas Blasphemiarum
pullulare, quot Vitia sunt; dum autem ita Fides Scribuntur, ut Volumus, aut ita
ut volumus, intelliguntur.
Hilarii Lib. ad Constantium.

O X F O R D :

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS, M. DCC. LXXII.

SOLD BY DANIEL PRINCE; AND BY JOHN AND
FRANCIS RIVINGTON, IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
YARD, LONDON.

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IT may not be improper to acquaint the *Reader*, that the Author intends a *second Dissertation* upon *heretical Opinions*, shewing the *Nature* of *Heresy*, the principal *Causes* of *religious Errors*, and in what *Respects* they are *innocent* or *sinfull*, with an *Answer* to some *Excuses*, which are generally urged by *false Christians*, as well as avowed *Unbelievers*.

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It may not be improper to acquaint the Reader, that the Author intends a second Dissertation upon several Opinions, shewing the Nature of them, the principal Order of them, their History, and in what Respects they are innocent or sinful, with an Answer to those Objections, which are generally urged by false Christians, as well as honest Unitarians.

23:00:62

T O

JAMES WEST, ESQUIRE,

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT,

A N D

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY,

THIS DISSERTATION

I S,

WITH THE GREATEST ESTEEM

AND GRATITUDE,

DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR.

E R R A T A.

Page 1. line 7. and p. 4. l. 3. *for Idendity,*
read Identity. P. 5. l. 3. *for Repetions*
read Repetitions. P. 16. *in the Notes, for*
J. Higuis read J. Itigius. P. 41. *at the Bot-*
tom, for no it read it no, P. 50. *for For-*
ture's Caprice, read capricious Fortune,
P. 56. l. 25. *for Denomination. read Deno-*
minations. P. 68. l. 15. *for require. read*
requires. and l. 19. for and though it be
granted, that some of them read some Truths
P. 85. l. 12. *for do not read does not* P.
98. l. 24. *for Gentlemen, read Gentleman,*

N. B. In Page 59. line 1. the following Note should have been inserted.

Rerum Pondera minutissimis sententiis fregit, but how far do these
School Divines fall short of the other Part of Seneca's Character, quod
abundant dulcibus Vitiis.—Instead of abounding in agreeable Faults,
their very Learning sometimes creates Disgust, and savours so much
of Pedantick Affectation, that it is rather a Disgrace than Ornament
to its Professors.—Quintil. Lib. 10. c. 1.

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A
D I S S E R T A T I O N
U P O N
HERETICAL OPINIONS, &c.

S E C T. I.

The D E S I G N.

THE *Constitution* of *human Nature* has been always the same, in all *Countries*, and in all *Ages* of the *World*; Even the *Diversity* of *Opinions*, which prevail amongst Men, is so far from being any reasonable *Objection* against this *essential Idendity*, that it is a distinguishing *Proof* of it, and shews, that, though We are *rational*, yet We are weak and fallible *Creatures* of the same *Complexion*: All *History* sets before Us a perpetual *Revolution* of *Sentiments*, a kind of *Flux* and *Reflux* in the *Minds*, as well as *Actions* of Men; If the *Scene* changes, it soon revives, and the same *Face* of things appears again, perhaps in some respects, with a different *Air*, but with many striking Marks

B of

of *Resemblance*; How often do We see one *System* rising, decaying, and out of its *Ruins* another springing up, which is again succeeded by some Principles of near *Affinity* to the *First*, insomuch that one *Period* of *Time* is a kind of *Comment* upon another?

If a *Man*, says Lord *Bacon*, considers the *Universe* and the *Fabrick* of it, this *Globe* of *Earth* with the *Men* upon it, and their busy *Motions*, (excepting always the *DIVINENESS* OF *SOULS*) will not seem to him much more considerable than an *Hillock* of *Ants*, whereon some creep up and down with their *Corn*, others with their *Eggs*, others empty; all, about a very little *Heap* of *Dust*.^a

It might be thought strange perhaps by some, that such a *Mass* of *Corruption*, such a *Chaos* of *Absurdities* could be collected or blended together by rational *Creatures*, if there was any sure *Criterion*, any fixed determinate *Standard* for the *Investigation* of *Truth*.

This is a Matter of great *Triumph* to the *Sceptick*, who is vain enough to set up a self-destructive *Scheme*, to prove by his own *Deductions*, that *Reason* is of little or no Force even in its best *Enquiries*, and by his own pretended *Evidences* of *Truth*, that there is no

^a Advancement of Learning, c. 8.

solid Foundation, upon which *Truth* can stand with Strength and Security : In all Ages, how many *Pyrrhonists* and minute *Philosophers*, ancient as well as modern, have endeavoured to overturn all Distinctions between *Right* and *Wrong*, *good* and *evil*, *Certainty* and *Uncertainty*, and to sport even with *Demonstration* itself, as a false and delusive *Light*, rather tending to amuse or dazzle the *Imaginations* of Men, than to illuminate or convince their Understandings?

With Men of this Cast, ever *doubting* and *denying*, though *dogmatically* asserting their own Notions, *Religion* never fails to be treated with Contempt and *Ridicule* : They appeal to *Facts*, and tell us, that there is such a Multiplicity of disagreeing Sentiments amongst Men, the learned as well as the unlearned, that in so thick a *Covert*, *Truth*, if it does exist, is no where to be found, and that it is in vain for human Reason to strive to make its Way through such a dark and inextricable *Maze* of Errors : The *Disparity* of Opinions, and the many *Divisions*, which abound among all *Religionists*, is a favourite *Topick* of *Declamation*, and is often set off by *Unbelievers* with very high artificial *Flourishes* ; but though the *Premises* are allowed to be true, what unjust and inconclusive Arguments are drawn from them ? *Exceptions* of this kind were of an early Date,

and the *Answers* given to Them were not less ancient; *Clemens* of *Alexandria* confesses, that there was no *Harmony*, no *Idendity* of Opinion amongst either *Jews* or *Gentiles*, *Philosophers* or *Physicians*; but he very judiciously replies, that the Growth of *Heresies* was foretold by our *Lord* himself, that *Truth*, though often hard to be discerned, would amply recompense the Labour of finding it; how ridiculous, says he, would it be for the *Traveller* not to go his *Journey*, because there are many *Cross-Ways*, which may possibly mislead him? Or for the *Husbandman* not to till his *Ground*, because *Weeds* grow up together with the *Plants*? These are just and *apposite Allusions*, and from hence he infers, that though there be various *Seets*, and Differences of Opinion amongst Christians, yet these ought rather to quicken than discourage our Pursuits after that which is *Truth* indeed;^a With modern Unbelievers, nothing is more common than to rake into the *Ashes* of *Antiquity*, and to make use of stale Objections as their own; But a new *Mint* cannot give a *sterling Value* to old adulterated *Coin*: These great *Refiners* may possibly have Art enough to work off the *Rust*, but their false *Varnish* cannot change the Nature

^a ὡς ἐπίγνωσις τῆς οὕτως ὄντος ἀληθείας *Stromat. Lib. 7. p. 753.*
— See *Cave's Life of Irenæus.*

and Relation of Things; Both the Arguments and the Answers to them are still the same; and ten thousand Repetitions of the *Former* will not weaken the Force and Validity of the *Latter*: The *Impression* is struck too deep to be obliterated by any thin *superficial Colourings*.

How often do we find the *Zealots* of the Church of Rome making Use of this evasive Plea, that there are perpetual Dissentions and Divisions amongst Christians of all Denominations, except *Themselves*? And in this Confidence of Boasting, they pretend, that theirs must necessarily be the only true *Catholic Church*, and that there certainly must be one supreme infallible *Judge* in religious Controversies, one determinate Center of *Unity*, the only true Preservative of Peace and Concord: In this respect, how nearly does the Spirit of Popery and Infidelity agree with each other?

Almost all the *Deistical* Writings are full of this Complaint, that there is no *Uniformity of Opinion* about the Doctrines and Precepts of the Gospel: Lord *Herbert* lays this as a heavy Charge upon Revealed Religion, and urges it as a reasonable Motive for adhering to his *five Articles*, in which, he says, all are *universally agreed*: *Who*, says another, of the same Class,^a

^a *Notes on Philostratus*, Ch. Bl. Lib. 1. c. 1. & Lib. 1. c. 16.

will

will believe *Witnesses* on their own *Words*, if they disagree in their *Testimony*? When one *Seet* upbraids another's *Folly*, a *Wise Man* discerning the *Folly* of both, comes to the *Knowledge* of *Truth*.---And a late *Right Honorable Writer* paces in the same *Trammels*, I am sure, says he, that *Experience* from the first *Promulgation* of *Christianity* to this *Hour* shews abundantly with how much *Ease* and *Success*, the most opposite, the most extravagant, nay the most impious *Opinions*, and the most contradictory *Faiths* may be founded on the same *Text*, and plausibly be defended by the same *Authority*.^a

It is the Design of the following *Treatise* to invalidate the Force of these pretended *Objections*, not by denying the *Facts*, which are indeed too well confirmed by the whole *Tenor* of *Church History*, which informs us, that there always were men of erroneous Principles, of corrupt *Minds*, and reprobate concerning the *Faith*; but by shewing that these perverse *Disputings* of Men are no Arguments against the *Truth*, or the standing *Evidences* of it, and that in some respects they rather strengthen than weaken the divine *Authority* of the *Gospel*,----I shall therefore first, draw out the *Charge* at length, in its full *Blaze* of *Evi-*

^a *Lord Bolingbroke*, v. 1. p. 179.

dence, without the least Disguise or Extenuation, from whence it will appear what a *Train* of Errors have constantly infested the Church of Christ in all the several Periods of it; and from this View of Things (though a melancholy Prospect indeed) I shall proceed in the next place to shew, that these Corruptions of Christianity are no Grounds at all for the false Pretences of *Popery* or *Infidelity*. Perhaps the *Wound* when laid open, may be the sooner healed and the more easily cleansed from all its Filth and Gangrene.

One of the noblest Uses, says a learned Writer, which can be made of Christian Antiquities, would be to learn Wisdom, and Union and Moderation from the Faults, Indiscretions and Follies, --- and from the Prudence, Charity and Piety of our Predecessors; to observe carefully what was good, and what was blameable in remoter Ages, and thence to improve ourselves as we are a Christian Nation, by removing the Blemishes and Defects, from which perhaps we are not free, and by adopting every Thing commendable, which we may have neglected.^a

^a Jortin's Preface to his Remarks upon Ecclesiastical History. Vol. 1. p. 10, 11.

S E C T. II.

A Sketch of some heretical Opinions, which prevailed in the three first Centuries till the Reign of Constantine:

THE coming of *false Prophets* and *false Teachers* were so far from being unexpected Events, that They were expressly foretold both by *Christ* and his *Apostles*; and agreeably to these Predictions, the *Mystery of Iniquity began to work betimes*; The blessed *Light of the Gospel* was overspread with the dark *Shades of Error*, almost as quick as the Succession of *Night after Day*.

The *Jews*, to whom the sacred Oracles were first preached, were wanting in no means, nor Artifices, which a perverse and stubborn Generation could possibly devise, to stop their Progress and to make the *Commandments of God of none Effect by their Traditions*; Even They, who were not hardened against all Conviction, still inherited the Genius and Complexion of their *Forefathers*, who could not forget the *Leeks*, the *Onions* and the *Garlick of Egypt*, these *half-Converts*, though they could not resist the astonishing Power of the Gospel, were possessed with a *Judaizing Spirit*,
which

which caught hold of their Affections, and would not permit them to throw off their Fondness for *Circumcision* and the *carnal Ordinances of the Law*.

These partial *Attachments* soon became the Causes of many Divisions in the Churches of *Rome, Galatia, and Corinth*. The Minds of many, though well-disposed Christians, were corrupted; even some of the apostles themselves were staggered in their Belief, and in much *Doubt*, whether some ritual Observances of the Law might not occasionally be intermixed with the pure and spiritual Precepts of the Gospel. This was the first *Controversy*, that was started in the Christian Church; a solemn Council was held at *Jerusalem* upon this important Subject,^a and the whole Process was carried on, not like the *Councils* of After-ages, with Heat and Acrimony, but with Temper and Moderation; and it was soon brought to a final Decision, without the least Whisper of Discontent, in perfect Harmony and Love.

When the Gospel enlarged its Boundaries, and its pure and heavenly Seed was sown among the *Gentiles*, this new *Soil* was likewise overran with a great Abundance of *Tares* and *Weeds*.

^a A. D. 48.

These primitive Ages are called by some, the *Glory and Flower* of Christianity; the Church of these Days is stiled by *Hegesippus*, the *uncorrupt and Virgin Church*; ^a but, even in this first Infancy of the Gospel, many Heresies sprang up, which defiled the Purity and Perfection of the Christian Faith. We find by some *Fragments* of *Hegesippus* ^b himself, that the *Body of Christ* was soon rent *asunder* by *factious Spirits* and novel Devices. This *antient apostolical Man*, as He is characterized by *Photius*, ^c expressly asserts, that *Thebuthis*, because He was not made a *Bishop*, was the First who began to vitiate the Doctrines of Christ. But of this Person We hear but little in all the Remains of Antiquity, and may reasonably conclude, either that his Notions died with him, or were swallowed up in the great *Gulph* of other Heresies.

We may with more colour of Reason believe, that ^d *Simon Magus* stood foremost in the long List of *Heresiarchs*: This great *Magician* had a numerous *Offspring*, who perhaps did not rise to the same Pitch of Impiety in all

^a Euseb. Lib. 4. c. 22.

^b Hegesippus spoke this of the Church of Jerusalem in particular, which Eusebius attributes to the whole Church. See Valefius's Notes. Euseb. Lib. 3. c. 32.

^c δεχόμενος πὶ ἀνὴρ καὶ ἀπεσταλμένος—*Photius Biblio. Cod.* 232.

^d Simon Magus is said to come to Rome in the Time of *Claudius*.—A. D. 41.

respects,

respects, but much resembled him in many of their *Features*; and trod nearly in the same *Steps*, though they might deviate from him in some peculiar Instances. The chief Abettors of his *Tenets* were the *Gnosticks*, who are considered by some antient *Writers*,^a as a particular *Seet* united in one *System*; but as the Accounts of them are not always uniform and consistent, but marked with some Distinctions and Diversities of Opinion, it is more reasonable to think, that several Species of Hereticks assumed to themselves the pompous Title of *Gnosticks*, according to the original Signification of the *Word*,^b through a vain Pretence to much Wisdom and Knowledge.

It has been computed, that there were not less than ten Branches of this Heresy,^c whose Principles did not all exactly square with each other, though they had many wild extravagant Fictions common to all. In the most essential Points of Religion, what absurd Notions did they entertain concerning the *Deity*, whom they strangely divided and subdivided? and concerning the *Incarnation of Christ*, whom

^a *Epiphanius, Tertullian* and others.

^b *Epiphan. Hær. 27. c. 1.*

^c *Simon, Menander, Saturnilus, Basilides, Nicolaus, Carpocrates, Valentinus, Colobarsus, Ptolemæus and Secundus.*—*Vide Petavii Animadversiones in Epiphaniæ Opus ad Hæresin 26 Gnosticorum p. 45.*

they supposed to pass through the Body of the *Virgin Mary*, as through a *Pipe* or *Conduit*? Nor were their Opinions of the *Resurrection* and future *Judgment* less fantastical. In favour of their own Inventions, they forged many *Apocryphal Books*, and held them as sacred as the Word of God; but the *true* Scriptures how did they mangle and torture, according to their own capricious Humours? ^a Some received only a Part of St. *Matthew's* Gospel, some rejected the whole, ^b and indeed all the *Evangelical Writings*: Nor were ^c St. *Paul's* *Epistles* treated with less Contempt; all were forced to give Way to their own spurious Compositions, such as the Gospel according to the *Hebrews*, the Gospel of St. *Philip*, the *Revelations of Adam*, the Gospel of *Perfection*, the *Book of the Prophet Barchabas*. Nor were their *moral Disquisitions* less absurd: Many of them trampled under Foot the Laws of *Reason*, as well as *Revelation*: They recommended a *Community of Wives*, and the grossest *Lasciviousness*, beyond all the Bounds of Sobriety, Modesty, and Virtue.

This Account, how monstrous soever it may appear, will be less astonishing, if we consider

^a The Cerdonians. ^b The Cerinthians and Carpocratians.
^c The Ebionites and Nazarenes.

the Principles of the *Valentinians*,^a who were a Sort of *Gnosticks* pretending to great Refinements, and to reduce their Notions into a regular and better compacted System than others: As though they had been admitted into the secret *Councils of Heaven*, and were able to unfold the whole Order and Oeconomy of celestial Beings, what a strange *Theogony* did they form? how much resembling that of *Hesiod*? or rather, how did their wild Excursions of Fancy exceed the utmost Stretch of *Poetical Invention*, or even soar beyond the most extravagant Flights and Sallies of the *Jewish Cabalists*?

^a According to their romantick Accounts, there were thirty *Æons*, fifteen *Male* and fifteen *Female*. In this imaginary *Scale* of divine Existences, *Bythos* was supposed to be the *Head*, the most *high* and *ineffable Father*, with whom was connected *Charis* and *Sige*, and from them descended a gradual *Subordination* of Beings, all begotten in a natural Way, and by the collective and co-operating Influence of all, constituting the *Pleroma*, or Plenitude of the *Godhead*. What a patched Composition of Divinity was this? Mere *Platonick Ideas* realized into *Persons*? Or rather a Gene-

^a See Lord King's History of the Apostle's Creed, p. 98. briefly extracted from the first Book of *Irenæus*.

alogy of Gods, no other than the Creatures of vain Imagination, struck out of nothing but mere *Chimeras*.

And upon this *baseless Fabrick* of the Gods, what an absurd System of moral Duty did these visionary Schemists erect, without any essential Distinctions between Good and Evil, or any determinate Sanctions of Rewards and Punishments? They would not allow, that any *Vice* whatever could destroy *spiritual Men*, or that any *Virtue* could preserve *material Men*, or that even the *Animal Kind* had any Thing more to fear than bare *Annihilation*. This Heresy was the fruitful Source of many others,^a and in a particular Manner, *Ptolemy* is called by *Irenæus*, *Flosculus Valentini Scholæ*. p. 3. *Erasmi Edit.*

But in this wide Field, it would be too tedious to separate all the *Weeds*, which the vain and luxuriant Fancies of Men have planted in it. Concerning the *Demiurgus*, or *Creation* of the World, what various ill-digested Opinions were entertained? Some ascribed *Eternity* to the whole System of Nature; others imputed the original Formation of things to *Angels* only; ^b Some pretended, that there were *eight*

^a Heracleon, Colobarfus, Marcus, Secundus.

^b Simon Magus, Menander, Saturninus. *Iren. Lib. 1. c. 21.*

different

different Heavens, each of which was governed by its particular Prince;^a others carried their Dreams to a much higher Pitch of Extravagance, that there were three *Hundred and sixty-five Heavens*; and that the *Angels* of the last *Heaven*, being the starry one, that is visible to us, created this *inferior World*, with the Inhabitants thereof.^b

There was a strange Confusion of Sentiment, many heterogeneous Mixtures, *Pagan* and *Christian* Principles often blended together, insomuch that they favoured more of the *Academy* than of the Gospel of Christ.^c Most of the Heresies in these early Ages of the Church derived their Source either from the *Oriental* or *Greek Philosophy*, from the Schools of *Pythagoras* or *Plato*, from the *Portico* of the *Stoicks*, or the Gardens of *Epicurus*:^d With this View it was that *Tertullian*, in more Places than one (as though he was

^a Augustin. Hær. 6.

^b Basilidians.

^c Hoc fecit infelix Valentinus et Basilides, hoc fecit et Marcion, Hæritici; furati sunt isti linguas aureas de Hierocho, et Philosophiam nobis non rectas in Ecclesias introducere conati sunt Sectas, et polluere omnem Ecclesiam Domini. Origen. Hom. 7. in Josuen.

^d Ipsæ denique Hæreses a Philosophiâ subornantur, Inde Æones et Formæ, nescio quæ, et Trinitas Hominis apud Valentinum, Platonius ferat: Inde Marcionis Deus melior de Tranquillitate, a Stoicis venerat; et ut anima interire dicatur, ab Epicureis observatur.—Tertull. de Præf. Hær. p. 205.

pleased

pleased with the Expression) emphatically stiled the *Gentile Philosophers*, the *Patriarchs of Hereticks*.^a

The learned *Cave* in his *Historia Literaria* considers the ancient Hereticks in the same Light, as often borrowing their Notions from the *Pagans*: He tells us, that the Doctrines, which *Manes* spread, were fetched partly from the *Dregs of old Heresiarchs*, partly from the ridiculous *Triflings of the Orientals*, partly from the *absurd Tenets of the Gentile Philosophers*, and partly from the *Institutions of the Christian Religion itself*, from whence his Heresy was called by *Socrates*, *Græcising Christianity*.^b

It was at the latter End of the third Century, that *Manes* set himself up for an *Apostle* of Christ, and the *Comforter* promised by our Saviour. He alledged, that Christ had his Residence in the *Sun*, the Holy Ghost in the *Air*, *Wisdom* in the *Moon*, the Father in the *Abyss of Light*, and that the *Souls* of his Followers went through the *Elements* to the

^a Tertull. adversus Hermogenem p. 236. et rursus de Animâ p. 266.

^b Ἐκκλησιάζων χριστιανισμὸς Hist. Lit. p. 141.

^c A. D. 277.—The learned Bishop Pearson supposes *Manes* to be rather a *Title* than a *Name*, derived from the Hebrew word signifying a Heretick, but little regard is to be had to the casual Signification of Names.—Thus *Origen*, and others think *Ebion* to be the Name of a *Sett* and not of a *Man*, the *Jews* having called some of the primitive Christians by that Name out of Contempt, because the Word signifies *Poor*. *J. Higuis de Har. 1. Seculi.*

Moon. To these Fopperies he added the Notion of two supreme independent Principles, the one the Author of *Good*, the other the Author of *Evil*: This was not a new Opinion, but borrowed from the *Persian Magi*: It was first broached amongst Christians by *Scythianus* the *Magician*, and taken up by *Cerdon*, *Marcion*, and many of the *Gnostick Tribe*. It was carried down the Stream of Time with amazing Success, and spread itself far and wide amongst the *Persians*, *Chaldeans*, *Indians*, and most of the *Oriental Nations*.

To crown this wonderful System, the Followers of *Manes* gave a loose to all Kinds of Licentiousness, and opened such a wide Door to all Impurities, that it was a remarkable Saying of *Pope Leo*, that the *Devil* reigned in all other Heresies, but that he had built a *Fortress*, and raised a *Throne* in that of the *Manichees*, who embraced all the Errors and Impieties, which the vain Spirit of Man is capable of.

What a Blemish do these Specimens of heretical Depravity cast upon the primitive Ages of Christianity? What an *Insult* upon *Reason* as well as Religion? But how few are these in Comparison of the Whole, which are generally computed at near *ninety*, and will be found to be little short of that Number, if we

D

look

look into the Catalogues of *Philastrius*, *Epi-
phanus*, or *St. Augustin*, which perhaps in some
particular Instances, may be thought to be
overstrained, but when all reasonable *Deduc-
tions* are made, what can be more strong and
visible *Monuments* of the Folly, Vanity, and
Perverseness of Mankind? No Doubt, the true
Friends of the Gospel were much alarmed,
and ready to cry out in the Words of *Polycarp*,
*Good God! for what Times hast Thou reserved
us, that we should suffer such Things?*^a

But, on the other hand, it may not be im-
proper to observe, that as there were *many ig-
norant and unstable Men*, who handled the Word
of God deceitfully, and wrested the Scriptures to
their own *Perdition*; so there were never want-
ing the most able and powerful *Champions* in
the Christian Cause, ---- Men of distinguished
Piety and Learning, who ought to be *had in
everlasting Remembrance*, as holding fast the
Form of sound Words, and contending earnestly
for the *Faith once delivered to the Saints*.

And such was the prevailing Force and Ef-
ficacy of Truth, that it made its Way through
all Dangers and Difficulties, in Spite of all Op-
position, either from its open and avowed Ene-

^a *O bone Deus, in quæ me Tempora reservâsti, ut ita patiar?*
Irenæus in Epist. ad Florinum.

mies, or from the subtle Snares and Temptations of them, who with *cunning Craftiness lay in wait to deceive*. Neither the *Arrows* which *flew by Day*, nor the *Pestilence* which *walked in Darkness*, could resist the Power and Progress of the Gospel, which, in its first Beginning, was but as a *Grain of Mustard Seed*, but it *took Root downwards*, spread its Branches *upwards*, and *brought forth Fruit* abundantly.

Through its own Excellence, and the superior Directions of Providence, it *went forth and prospered*, still *conquering and to conquer*, till *Kings became its nursing Fathers*, and *Queens its nursing Mothers*.

S E C T. III.

Various Opinions, which disturbed the Peace of the Church from the Days of Constantine till the full Establishment of Popery.

AND here a new Scene opened itself: When the Empire became *Christian*, and the Gospel was sheltered under the Wings of secular Authority, what a fair and beautiful Prospect was this? Temples began to rise, *Imperial Edicts* were issued with a kind Indulgence towards Christians, and there was every where diffused amongst them a smiling Appearance of Peace and Unity, Truth and Splendor.

But the Wantonness of Prosperity produced quite different Effects, and, as St. *Jerom* expresses it, the Church lost as much of her Virtue, as she gained of Power and Wealth.^a Faction and Sedition sprang up, and Tares were sown, not like those mentioned in the Gospel by an Enemy, who came by Night, but with an open Hand and in broad Day-Light.

^a Et postquam ad Christianos Principes venerit, Potentiâ quidem et Divitiis major, sed Virtutibus minor est. Tom. 2. p. 2. p. 91.

The turbulent Spirit of the *Donatists* spread Confusion every where: They pretended to be great Sticklers for Order and Discipline, but how inconsistent was their Conduct towards *Cæcilian* and other catholick *Bishops*?^a With what daring Insolence and Cruelty did they condemn many innocent Persons as *Traditores*, though they themselves were guilty of the basest *Sacrilege*, in burning the *Communion-Tables*, and throwing the *Eucharist*, if not consecrated by *Themselves*, to the *Dogs*? Such was their Pride, that they appropriated the due Administration of *Baptism* to themselves alone; but *rebaptized* those, who were not Members of their own Communion: ^b *Optatus* has drawn their Picture at large; he tells us, *that to be a Terror to the Living, they ill-treated even the Dead, and in a Manner quarrelled with them, by denying a Place for their Burial.*^c The *Edicts* of the Emperor *Constantine*, and the Decisions of *Marcellinus* under the Emperor *Honorius*, they held in great Detestation; but they often passed the highest Encomiums upon the Character and Conduct

^a A Council held at *Arles* acquitted *Cæcilian* and declared his Election valid.—A. D. 314.

^b He wrote seven Books of the Schism of the *Donatists* about the Year 368.

^c *Ut terreatis Vivos, male tractatis Mortuos, Negantes Funeribus Locum, cum mortuis litigatis.*—Opt. p. 99.

of the *Apostate Julian*,² as a wise and accomplished Prince: Such was their violent Rage for *Schism* and Confusion, that they slew the *Bishops* at the *Altar*, and those *Churches* which *Dioclesian* had spared, were by them razed to the Ground; but when the Interest of their own Party was at Stake, they did not scruple to join themselves in Confederacy and Friendship with the *Circumcellians*, the *Arians* and even the *Pagans*.

Nor were these *Tumults* soon appeased, they spread themselves far and wide, and raged with more or less Violence, not only over *Africa*, but a great Part of *Christendom* for more than three hundred Years.

What rigid and inflexible Stubbornness was this? It shews, that the Mind, when it has once taken a *crooked Bent*, does not easily grow into *Straitness* again; one evil Notion naturally begets another, and often produces a *Complication* of Errors.

Nor were these the only *Storms*, which beat against the *Church*; other Tempests arose, even where a *Calm* was most expected: The *Trinitarian Controversy*, though handled even by *Christian Bishops*, was the unhappy Source of

² Quæ Cædes a vobis factæ; postquam Julianus Basilicas tradidit? Opt. p. 91.

of much Faction and Sedition : The *Seeds* of this Dispute had been long sown, some elementary Principles of it had taken *Root* in the early Ages of the Gospel, and were propagated by *Cerintbus* in *Asia*, *Menander* in *Samaria* and *Antioch*, by *Carpocrates* in *Egypt*, by *Ebion*, most probably, in *Judea*, and above all, by *Paulus of Samosata*, who was condemned and deposed by a publick Synod held at *Antioch*.^a

But, in the Beginning of the fourth Century Debates rose higher ; the *Flame* was kindled with more Vehemence ; and, to allay these violent Heats and Animofities, the *Council* of *Nice* was called.^b But what were the Issues of this solemn and venerable Assembly ? Altercations began, and were carried on with such a Spirit of Rancour and Malice, that this grand *Apparatus* became no other than a busy Scene of Strife and Contention : Here the kind and candid, as well as authoritative Intercessions of the *Emperor*, were, for the sake of Peace and Quiet as well as Truth, absolutely necessary : But what was the Result ? The warm Disputes were hushed into Silence for a while, the Passions of Men were a little cooled, and there appeared some visible Traces of Unity and Concord, but they were far

^a A. D. 265.

^b A. D. 325.

from being of any long Duration. The *Wound* was only skinned over: It broke out again; and with renewed Rancour bled afresh.

Different *Modes of Explication* were invented, new *Hypotheses* were broached, and all, though repugnant to each other, under the sacred *Veil* of Christianity: The *Arians*, the *Apollinarians*, the *Nestorians*, and the *Eutychians*, all widely differed from each other; but all claimed the same Authority of Scripture, and pretended to form their Notions by that genuine and unerring Standard of divine Truth. The *First* denied the *Divinity* of Christ, and were condemned by the first general *Council of Nice*:^a The *Second*, who renounced his *Manhood*, incurred the publick Censure of the second general *Council* held at *Constantinople*:^b The *Third* opposed the *Hypostatical Union* of both Natures, and were branded and hereticated by the *Council of Ephesus*:^c The *Fourth*, who denied all *Distinction* of the two Natures, and supposed the one to be entirely swallowed up in the other, were condemned by the general *Council of Chalcedon*.^d

Under each *Division* there were some *Subdivisions*: Their Sentiments, though they bor-

^a A. D. 325.

^b A. D. 381.

^c A. D. 431.

^d A. D. 451.

dered nearly upon each other, often admitted of some little *Variations*, of the *Arians* more especially it is said, that there were not less than twelve Species of them, ^a though they generally went under the same *Denomination*.

Amidst such a Multiplicity of Opinions partly agreeing and partly disagreeing, what wonder was it, that the Passions of Men were much inflamed, and their Minds embittered one against another? In the publick Estimation, how did they rise or fall, according to the several Decrees of *Councils*, and the different Attachments of different *Popes* and *Emperors*? The Smiles and Frowns of Fortune changed alternately, sometimes on the *Catholick*, and sometimes on the opposite Side: Dignity and Disgrace, Victory and Banishment, were the uncertain Lots, which fell by Turns upon *Arius* and *Athanasius*, the *Omo-ousians* or *Omoi-ousians*, the true or false Believers, according to the prevailing System of *Orthodoxy*.

In Support of these jarring Sentiments no Pains were spared: Pious *Frauds*, *Visions*, and *Legendary Stories* were often invented; and to give a stronger Sanction than all, a successive Train of fictitious *Miracles* were continually

^a Arians, Semiarians, Anomians, Exacoutians, Eusebians, Photinians, Eudoxians, Acafians, Eunomians, Macedonians, Ælians, Psatyrians.

forged with great Craft and Disimulation, though under a specious Disguise of Truth, and a sincere Regard to the Interest of Religion. *Creeds* were set up by opposite Parties against *Creeds*, and *Synods* against *Synods*.

Though the Gospel never wanted strenuous Advocates in its Defence, yet within its own *Bosom*, there were always *Enemies* ready to deface its *Beauty* and to degrade its *Dignity*. All drank out of their own *Cisterns*, some out of the *Fountain of Living Waters*, others, as the Prophet expresses it, *bewed* them out *Cisterns*, *broken Cisterns, that can hold no Water*. Jer. ii. 13.

If we go on in our Enquiries, that great and good Man St. *Augustin* ^a presents himself to our View, eminently distinguished for his many Labours in the Christian Cause, but not without his Weaknesses: How did his Zeal against the *Pelagian Heresy* carry him with a kind of over-heated *Enthusiasm* beyond the Bounds of Reason and Truth? His favorite *Idol* was *Election* or *Reprobation*, but that of *Pelagius* was *Free-Will*: The One too much depreciated the Gifts and Endowments of human Nature, and may in some Measure be

^a St. Augustin was baptized A.D. 387, when he was 33 Years old.—He died A. D. 430.

said to strip it of its moral and rational Faculties : The *Other* extolled the natural Powers of Man too high, as almost sufficient of themselves, independent of divine *Grace* and *Assistance*. The *One* thought, that Man contributed but little to the *working out* his own *Salvation*, but was *predestinated* to it by the fixed and *unalterable Decrees* of God : The *Other* maintained, that a regular and perfect Obedience might be performed by the abstracted Operations of the *Will*, and a Man's own voluntary Endeavours. ^a

This Controversy became more and more embarrassed : The *One's* Opinion of divine *Grace*, and the *Other's* of human *Liberty* were often overstrained, misunderstood and misrepresented ; and through the Heat of Opposition and the Intricacies of *Metaphysical Divinity*, the Writers, on both Sides the Question, rather perplexed than unravelled the Subject, and rather darkened than enlightened the Minds of each other.

Some indeed went under the Name of *Semi-Pelagians*, who set up for a kind of *Moderators* in this Dispute ; but how did they acquit themselves ? with some softenings indeed, ---

^a St. Augustin published two Treatises de Prædestinatione et de Perseverantiæ Dono.

some nice affected *Distinctions* concerning the Terms, *Grace* and *Liberty*, but with little Difference; when they came to explain themselves, they varied not much from the *Pelagians*, or rather trod in the same *Steps*, though with a *lighter Foot*.

Unfortunately for the *Pelagians*, the Stream of Power and Favour ran strongly against them; *Imperial Edicts* were issued out against their *Persons*, as well as *Doctrines*; and with great Acrimony, their Tenets were condemned by many publick Councils.^a Even the Suffrage of the People, as well as the most powerful *Ecclesiasticks*, turned with a strong Tide against them, and indeed in some Instances, with a Spirit detestable and unchristian.

The Truth seems to lie between both Extremes: As we are moral and rational Agents, we must use our own Endeavours, though without the co-operating Grace of God, We are able *to do nothing of ourselves*; but, on the other Hand, the saying of *Faustus*, a Semi-Pelagian Bishop, is a just and sensible Remark, not to be contradicted: If *One is doomed to Life, and another to Perdition, we are not born,*

^a Pelagius was condemned by several Councils in Afric and by a Synod at Antioch. — Baron. An. 419.

that

that we may be judged, but we are judged before we are born; ^a absolute and unconditional *Predestination* is repugnant to all the moral Perfections of the *Deity*, and tears up all Religion by the very Roots.

We come now to the middle Ages of the Church, in which various Opinions sprang up of a different Nature, which disturbed its Peace, and were the unhappy Occasions of much Strife and Contention.

But I shall only mention the Doctrine of the *Monothelites*, which made a great Noise and seems to claim especial Notice. ^b

The great *Question* was, whether there was in Christ only one *Will* and one *Operation*, or two *Wills* and *Operations*, *divine* and *human*, whether the human Will was quite absorbed by the divine, or whether they acted separately, and independent on each other, as two distinct *Volitions*, or *Operations*.

This was considered as a nice and delicate Point, and amongst the *Casuits*, or rather *Sophists* of this Age, great Disturbances ensued

^a Si ergò unus ad Vitam, Alter ad Perditionem ut asserunt, deputatus est, sicut Quidam Sanctorum dixit, non judicandi nascimur, sed judicati. De Lib. Arbit. 1. 4.

^b A Council at Rome was called, in which the Doctrine of the Monothelites was condemned.—A. D. 649.

both

both in the *East* and *West*.^a The *Ecthesis* or Exposition, which was published in the Name of the Emperor *Heraclius*, though composed by *Sergius*, rather tended to kindle than to extinguish the Flame: It concluded with these remarkable Words, *We believe, that the Body of Christ, though animated with a rational Soul, produced no Motion whatever of itself*. And here it is very observable, that one *Bishop of Rome*,^b *Honorius* gave a Sanction to this Sentence, and another Bishop, *John the 4th*, rejected it with the highest Scorn and Indignation: What was this, as *Bower* justly remarks, but sapping the very Foundation of *Papal Authority*.^c

Another famous *Edict* was issued, known by the Name of the *Type* or *Formulary*, but This was productive of no better Effects than the *Ecthesis*; The Adherents and Opponents to both fell under mutual Reproaches, and mutual *Anathemas*: Various Engines of Oppression were set at Work, and from the Hands of Christians against Christians ----- Pope *Martin* himself, was fettered, banished and

^a A. D. 639.

^b A. D. 626.

^c Bowyer Vol. 3d. p. 27.

reduced to extreme Want, even to Death itself.

This is a very interesting Part of Ecclesiastical History, as it exhibits to our View a strange Contrariety of Principles, even those of *Pope* against *Pope*, and *Councils* against *Councils*, a sure Evidence, that neither of them could possibly be the determinate Center of *Infallibility*.

Upon the Whole, we may observe, that the Constitution of the Church was beset with Dangers on all Hands, and was chiefly governed by *political Arrangements*, by Caprice, Ambition, and sæcular Views, more than by the unerring Standard of the Word of God.

The Scriptures, instead of being explained by the sober Rules of *Criticism*, were often twisted and tortured by *Mystical* and *Allegorical Interpretations*, by figurative Constructions, and far-fetched Allusions, refined without Sense, and spiritualized, if I may so speak, without the rational Breathings of Piety and Devotion: To stop the Growth of Error and Heresy, many specious *Antidotes* were contrived; but these were often worse than the Disease itself, and instead of salutary Medicines, were destructive, even as *Poison*.

It

It is easy to see, that these were such flagrant Corruptions of true Christianity, that they could not but bring forth *evil Fruit*: They were the *Signs* of the *Times*, the *Preludes* of the coming of *Antichrist*, the *Forerunners* of Popery, Idolatry and Superstition.

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S E C T. IV.

A Sketch of the principal Errors and Corruptions of the Church of Rome.

WE may say of *Papal*, as well as *Pagan Rome*, that it was not *built in a Day*. Her grand *Hierarchy* did not start into Form at once, but was the gradual unremitting Labour of many Centuries.---The first Trace of *Papal Usurpation* shewed itself in the Days of *Victor*, and his Successors in the *Apostolic See* never lost Sight of this favorite Object of their Ambition ; but they availed themselves of every Circumstance, which Fortune threw in their Way.

And indeed there was a wonderful Coincidence of many Causes, which helped forwards the growing *Scheme*, advanced the distinguishing *Primacy* of the *Roman Pontiff*, and gained him by way of Eminence, the exalted Title of *universal Bishop*.---The Removal of the Seat of Government to the *Eastern Parts*, the Declension of the *Roman Power*, the Confusions in *Italy*, *Fictitious Decretals*, Ignorance of the *Scriptures*, and all the various Horrors of *Persecution* tended to break down the Fences of Christian

F

Liberty

Liberty, and to make Way for the most arbitrary Strides of Tyranny and Despotism.

When the Pope was armed with both *Swords*,^a when the civil and spiritual Jurisdiction centered in one supreme *Lord* and *Monarch* of the whole Earth, what could the Power of naked and defenceless Truth avail against such strong and impregnable *Outworks*? Not only the insinuating Arts of *Policy*, but *Force* and *Violence* were near at Hand to command Obedience to this holy, *catholick*, and *Apostolick Church*. To strengthen these outward Fortifications no kind of *Artillery* was wanting, no spiritual *Arms*, which *Fraud* could invent, nor temporal *Sanctions*, which the Civil Power, with all its Terrors could possibly ordain.

Infallibility was a Weapon of too much Force to be resisted; it bore down all *Arguments* at once; and all Opposition, like the *Wall of Jericho* at the Sound of the *Trumpet*, fell down flat before it.---*Josh. vi. 20.*

When the Fabrick of the Church was thus supported in its main *Pillars*, what Care and Diligence were constantly exerted to secure its *Under-props*, and to strengthen all its subordinate Parts, which had any *Bearing*, or even

^a A. D. 607.

the least Tendency to hold up the Pomp and Grandeur of the *Apostolic See*?

The Honour, or rather the Pride and Ambition of the *Priesthood*, were of too much Consequence to be overlooked: Why was *Cælibacy* enjoined them, but as a political Means of Wealth? Why, but to hold up the Pre-eminence of the sacred Function, was the Privilege of *Communion* in both Kinds denied to the Laity? To heighten the Clerical Character, *Seven Sacraments* were instituted, many personal Immunities were granted, and many spiritual Endowments claimed, the *Charismata*, not of the Gospel, but of Popery: Nothing was omitted, that could give an Amplitude to the publick Offices of the Church, or bestow Honour upon those by whom they were administered.

Transubstantiation, if true, would have been indeed an extraordinary *Monument* of the supernatural Abilities of the Priesthood. What could be a more illustrious Proof of their wonder-working Power, than by their *Consecration*, or rather by their *Cringes* and *Grimaces*, their solemn *Bowings* and Prostrations, together with a few Words in a Language not understood by the People, to pronounce an instantaneous Change in the *Elements* of the *Bread* and *Wine*, and to convert them, (I will

not say *supernaturally*, but contrary to the established Laws of Nature) into the real *Body* and *Blood* of Christ himself? What a deluded Votary must he be, who swallows his dear *Redeemer*, and in Defiance of all the Evidence of Sense and Reason, presumes to *deify* his own *Devourings*? No other than *Ignorance* can be the *Mother* of such *Devotion*.---The whole mechanical *Apparatus* is so monstrous and absurd, that as a learned Prelate ^a observes, it *hangs*, like a *Mill-Stone* about the *Neck* of *Po-pery*, and must *sink* it at last.

It was with the same View, to aggrandize the Church, that the Doctrine of *Purgatory* was invented; What a lucrative Article was this to the Romish Priests, who are liberally paid for *Masses* and *Prayers* for the Souls of the deceased, that they may be purified from the *Dregs*, which, (as the *Catechism* for the *Council of Trent* expresses it,) *hinder* them from *entering* into their *eternal Country*?---But, what *Spark* of Probability can there be for the *Fire* of *Purgatory*? What secret Virtue can it have to operate upon immaterial *Spirits*? Where is the fixed Centre of this dark Vale of Imprisonment? Or what Power on Earth can unbar its Gates, and discharge the

^a Tillotson,

afflicted Criminals? Indeed the Power of *the Keys* is much boasted of, as though it had a *mystical Right* of opening the Door of *Heaven* as well as *Purgatory*; But, *Papal Bulls* and *Indulgences*, though conveyed under the solemn Seal of Authority, can be no Atonement for Sin, nor of any Efficacy to procure Admission into the invisible kingdom of Heaven.

Least this absolving Faculty should seem to be overstrained another Evasive *Plea* is ready at Hand, viz. a vain Pretence is made to Works of *Supererogation*: But where are these inexhaustible Funds? these valuable Treasures of *Merit* and *Good-Works*? By what Right can these be transferred, as an *Expiation* from the greatest Saints to the greatest Sinners? The best of Men are themselves but *Debtors*, too much in *Arrears* to commute their own Stock, and, as with a Sponge, to wipe off the *Insolvency* of Others.

It is evident, that all these Doctrines look towards one determinate Point, the sæcular Interest and Grandeur of the *Church of Rome*. To the *Priests* indeed, they may be *Gold*, and *Silver* and *precious Stones*, but they are in themselves no better than *Wood*, *Hay* and *Stubble*: The whole *Plan*, considered politically, and as carried on by the *Children of this World*, favours indeed of much *Wisdom* and *Subtlety*
unknown

unknown to the *Children of Light*; but take it in a religious View, its whole Foundation sinks, and has no Grounds of Reason, Scripture, nor Antiquity to support it.

Upon the same Reasons of *Policy* more than Religion, the Laity were kept in profound Ignorance and Darkneſs; the ſacred Oracles were locked up from their View; the *Key of Knowledge* was taken from them; and unwritten *Traditions*, or rather the *Voice* of the Church was the ſtanding Rule of *Faith* and Manners. Inſtead of *Chriſtian Liberty*, and a free and impartial Enquiry into *the Truth*, as *it is in Jeſus*, the Minds of Men were entangled in the *Yoke of Bondage*, and overwhelmed in the thick Miſts of Superſtition; The *Beauty of Holineſs* was placed, not in a rational and ſpiritual Worſhip, but in the outward and gaudy Representation of Things, though pleaſing to the Senſes, yet the Scorn of Reason: The many Objects of Romiſh Devotion withdrew the Attention of its Votaries from the one, ſupreme and eternal God, and fixed it upon the Creatures of human Invention, upon *Pictures, Images, Legendary Saints*, and canonized Martyrs, ſome of which had no Exiſtence at all, ſome were of *Pagan Extraction*, and Others, inſtead of a Claim to Adoration, were a Diſgrace, even to human Nature itſelf.

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It has indeed been said by some of the learned Doctors of this Church, that *Images* ought to be retained, as *Ornaments*, as *Helps* to the *Memory*, to *Devotion*, and to *Instruction*, even as *Books* to the *Ignorant* : The very Heathens endeavored to elude the Charge of *Idolatry* almost in the same Words : *Images*, says *Maximus Tyrius*, are only intended to help our *Memory*, and are a kind of *Manuduction* to the *Gods*.^a

Indeed the Romanists tell us, that the *Heathens* through their *Images* worshipped *false* Gods, but that the *Worship*, which *they* offer up, terminates in the one *true* and eternal God : What a poor Evasion is this ? They pretend to distinguish between *supreme* and *inferior*, *absolute* and *relative*, *direct* and *reductive* *Worship*, the *Worship* of *Latria*, and the *Worship* of *Dulia*, or rather *Hyperdulia* : But whence do they borrow these nice and formal Distinctions ? It is well known, that they address the *Virgin Mary* in more exalted Terms of *Honour* and *Adoration*, than even *Christ* himself ; and the *Honour* they pay to *Saints* and *Angels* is immediately directed to them, as the meritorious Subjects of their *Praises* and *Invocations* ; To talk of their *ultimate Intentions*,

^a ὥστε χειροποιήτων πρὸς τὸ ἰδεῖν αὐτοὺς ἀνάμνησιν. *Maximus Tyrius*
Diff. 38.

is only, when they are put to their last Shift, their ultimate *Equivocation*, a mere *Jesuitical Quibble*, which rather betrays a *Conviction* of Error, than extenuates the Guilt of it.--- The same frivolous Excuses were often made by the Heathens themselves; *Athenagoras* introduces them, as saying, that *Images* were only *Representations* of the Gods, to whom they were dedicated; and that the *Gifts*, *Honours*, and *Sacrifices* offered to them, belonged only to the Gods.^a

Nor is this the only Instance, in which there is a Conformity between antient and modern *Rome*. There are many striking Marks of Resemblance in the religious Systems of both *Popery* and *Paganism*; Their *Incense*,^b *holy Water*, *Lamps* and *Candles*, votive *Offerings*, *Images*, *Chapels* on the *Way-Sides* and *Tops of Hills*, *Processions*, *Miracles*, and a Variety of other Articles, are the adulterate Coin of both, stamped with the same *Image* and *Superscription*.

But still,----though they correspond so nearly in the Principles and Practices of Superstition, there is one *Point*, in which the *Romanists* much exceed their Heathen Ancestors, I mean, in that Spirit of *Intolerance* and

^a Athenagoræ Legatio pro Christianis p. 68, Ox. Ed.

^b See Dr. Middleton's Letter from Rome.

Uncharitableness, which will always remain as an indelible Disgrace upon this Church; The many *Papal Usurpations*, the *Depositions of Princes*, the *Laws* against *Hereticks*, the *Exclusion* of all others from any *Possibility* of Salvation, the *Persecutions* of Protestants, and that horrid and bloody *Tribunal*, the *Inquisition*;^a These are the most irrefragable Proofs of Tyranny and Despotism; not only repugnant to the mild and benevolent Temper of the *Gospel*, but even to the common Dictates of *Humanity* itself.

Much, indeed, has been said concerning the *Antiquity* of this Church, but with little Reason. --- There were indeed some early *Dawnings* of it, but the principal *Figures* were not brought forwards into View, till the middle Ages of Christianity, and the whole Piece was not completed in all its Variety of Features, and in its full Dimensions, till the dark and barbarous Ages, when many Innovations gradually and almost insensibly crept in; such as *Purgatory*, *Indulgences* and others, which like the clumsy Drawings of a *Gothic* Painter, filled up the *Canvas*, but gave no it additional Beauty or Ornament.

^a Siculi non invenere Tyranni Majus Tormentum.

But here it may not be improper to observe, that when Popery was first established and began to appear in its chief Glory and Splendor, the *Mahometan* Religion gained Ground, and made a swift Progress over the greatest Part of the *Eastern World*.^a

The *Chains* of Slavery had been already forged and rivetted upon the Minds of deluded Christians; and, when their *Necks* had been thus fitted and prepared for the heavy and galling Yoke of Popery, they certainly yielded with less Reluctance to the violent Force and arbitrary Impositions of *Mahomet*: The blind Superstition of the Romanists, as well as the Ignorance of the *Pagan-Arabs*, contributed much to the Success of this grand *Impostor*; who was Master of so much Artifice and Cunning, that he formed his System in many Respects agreeably to the vitiated Taste of the One as well as the Other. --- The *Alcoran* abounds in much outward Pomp and Pageantry, such as frequent Intercourses with *Angels*, and if not in Miracles, in many supernatural *Visions*, *Purifications*, *Holy Water*, *Pilgrimage*, *Fastings*, and a Distinction of *Meats* and *Drinks*. As these Doctrines had visible Traces of Resemblance to those of the

^a The *Æra* of the Mahometan Sect commenced A. D. 622.

Church of *Rome*, there is no Doubt, but they were swallowed with the better Relish by the new-converted *Mussulmen*.

When once Reason is lost and bewildered in its Enquiries, like a benighted Traveller, it knows not where to go, but seeks any Shelter it can find ; It often becomes an easy Prey to Error, and wantonly riots in the *Spoils* of Truth.

S E C T. V.

Monkery and School-Divinity the Sources of many Errors.

THE first Institutions of Monkery took Place, long before the Romish Hierarchy arrived at its full *Zenith*. *Paul* and *Anthony* are called by St. *Jerom*,^a the *Fathers* of the Christian *Hermits*: *Ægypt* was the first Seat of these religious Communities. --- In after Ages they made a great Progress, all over the Christian World. --- St. *Basil* was called the *Patriarch* of the *Eastern*, and St. *Benedict* of the *Western Monks*.

These solemn *Devotees* were discriminated in many Respects from the rest of Mankind, not only by their *Retirement*, but their *Habits*, their *Tonsure*, their Rules and Orders, their Fastings, Mortifications, and many affected Austerities; Their Fame gradually spread itself, and kept an even and a constant Pace with Superstition: It must indeed be allowed that some of them figured highly in point of *Literature*, and great Veneration was paid to

^a Ep. 22. ad *Eustochium*.

some *Monasteries*, as being in those Days the most eminent Schools of *Learning*, as well as *Religion*: Many of the antient Fathers were zealous Advocates for them, as the Places of their first Education, from whence they were called forth with great Honour, even into the *Episcopal Function*. --- But though these Institutions were originally calculated for the Improvement of human Knowledge, for pious *Contemplation* and the spiritual Exercise of religious Duties, yet they strangely degenerated from themselves and became in after-ages the *Seminaries* of Sloth, Ignorance, and of the most vitious Indulgences and Gratifications; The *Power of Godliness* was lost, though the *Form* of it remained.

It is well known, that the *Monks* were the most fiery *Zealots*, very strenuous Adherents to the Church, to the Pomp and Grandeur of the *Apostolic See*, and to all outward Rites and Ceremonies, more than to the vital Principles of Religion. ---- Their *Sequestration* from the World naturally contracted their Minds, and cast a *Cloud* over them, dark and solemn as the *Cloisters*, which they inhabited: It is no wonder, that Men of these narrow and rigid Sentiments, soured with *Zeal*, and tintured with *Superstition*, dealt in all the small Wares of *Fraud* and *Foppery*, in holy *Reliques* and *Trinkets*,

kets, in *Charms* and *Amulets*, in *legendary Stories* and *fictitious Wonders* of their imaginary *Saints* and *primitive Founders*: An Angel was said to be a constant Attendant upon ^a *Pachomius*, and some Authors tell us, that he was not only honoured with *Angelick Visions*, and the *Prediction* of future Events, but that he had so much Faith as to tread upon *Serpents*, and command *Crocodiles* to carry him over the *Nile*. ^b

Nothing was more common among the Monks of all Countries, ^c than *Pictures*, *Images*, and senseless *Idols*, the *Work of Man's Hands*, not only appearing with Signs of Life and Motion, but often working extraordinary Cures upon the humble Supplicants, who attended their *Shrines* and *Altars*: For it was

^a Vir ex iis, qui vixerunt in summo et perfecto Vitæ Instituto, adeo ut is fuerat dignatus et futurorum Prædictionibus, et Angelicis Visionibus.—Vide Pachomii Vitam. Hist. Laus, c. 38.

^b Gennad. cap. 7. de Vir. Illus. Bellarmine, &c.

^c There were various Orders of *Monks* in *Britain* as well as other Parts of *Christendom*, but the most distinguished were the *Benedictines*.—Indeed a Dispute arose, whether the Order of St. *Æquitius* was not more antient before the *Conquest*; the Matter was referred to the learned *Antiquaries*, who drew up a Paper in Latin, and subscribed their Names to it in Favour of the *Benedictines*.

Robertus Cotton

Henricus Spelman

Johannes Selden

Gulielmus Cambrdenus.

Upon whom *Fuller* passes this remarkable Encomium, that they were the four *Wheels* of the *triumphant Chariot of Truth*.

an Argument easily imposed upon the credulous Multitude, that they could not be deceived by Men of such holy and unblemished Lives, so highly distinguished above others, by their *Ave-Marys* and *Pater-nosters*, by the *Length* and *Number* of their Prayers, by their *Fastings*, *Penances*, and *Mortifications*. Under such a sacred and venerable Shade, what could possibly hurt the hardy *Plants* of Popery? They throve and flourished, as in a rich *luxuriant* Soil, well fitted for their Growth and Progress.

Indeed the highest *Encomiums* have been passed by some Writers upon those solemn Mortals, the Members of these religious Institutions: they have been compared to the industrious *Bees*, ever labouring in their *Cells*, or extracting Honey even from the *bitterest Herbs*; but their general Character is better drawn by a modern Historian; “*Papal Usurpations*, the *Tyranny of the Inquisition*, the *Multiplication of Holidays*; all these *Fetters on Liberty and Industry*, were ultimately derived from the *Authority and Insinuation of Monks*, who being scattered every where, proved so many *Colonies of Superstition and of Folly*.^b

^a Chrysostom. Tom. 2. 6. 236. Monachi Apsum Imitatores.

^b Hume's History of Henry the 8th, ch. 5. p. 198.

This

This is no exaggerated Account; The *Colours* are not too strong, but rather too faint and languid to describe the various Frauds, and artificial Disguises of Monkish Piety, or rather Hypocrisy.

Indeed in these latter Ages of Popish Tyranny, some Glimmerings of *Learning* began to shew themselves: These, if I may so call them, were the *clouded Rays of School-Divinity*;---That profound *Theology*, which now pretended to lift up its Countenance above others, rather served to perplex than enlighten the Minds of Men, and to disfigure rather than adorn, the genuine Beauty and Simplicity of the Gospel: Truth was as much buried under the heavy *Rubbish* of learned Superstition, as in the lumpish Soil of *Gothick Ignorance*: What Knowledge could be had from *Definitions* by hard Words, which meant little, and proved nothing? from formal and elaborate *Distinctions* lost in their own mysterious Refinements? from an endless Train of *Divisions* and *Subdivisions*, which only weakened the Force of the Argument, and frittered the Sense into *Scraps* and *Parcels*? We may justly apply to these *School Divines* Quintilian's Character of *Seneca*, “ by their *minute*

^a The 11th and 12th Centuries.

Sentences,

Sentences, they broke and enervated the real Weight of Things."---The unanimated Investigations of these theological Dictators were but *metaphysical Jargon*, destitute of all Life and Spirit; They might be said to anatomise a Subject, with a very nice and scrupulous Exactness, but in the Language of the Prophet, as *dry Bones, without Sinews, and without Breath.*^a

Amidst numberless Instances of this Kind, which might be produced, let it suffice only to mention the Expositions of the *Trinity*; We are told, that there is in God, one *Essence, two Processions, three Persons, four Relations, five Notions*, and the *Perichoresis, Circuminception* or *mutual In-dwellings* of the *three Persons*; the *Son proceeds from the Father by Generation, but the Holy Ghost by Spiration*; and much is said about *active and passive Spiration*. What a Jumble of Threads is this, mere *Cob-webs*, only fine-spun to be captivating *Snares to Flies*? A strange Method of unfolding the Mysteries of Christianity! What was this but to raise a *Phantom* out of their own Inventions, to draw a Circle of vain Disputation round it, and then to lay it again, in deep *Sleep* and *Oblivion*?

^a Ezek. c. 37.

From the unintelligible Disquisitions of these *profound*, angelick and irrefragable Doctors, as they were called, what violent Contests ensued between the *Nominals* and *Reals*, the *Scotists* and *Thomists*? Till at last, instead of fighting in the dark with metaphysical *Weapons*, they took up *Arms*, which they much better understood, and were able to handle with more Art and Dexterity.

Indeed all were not lost in the *Shades* of Ignorance and Superstition; The whole *Atmosphere* was not covered with one universal *Cloud*, but the Names of many might be mentioned, who appeared in the World, like *shining* and *burning Lights*, who dared to act as zealous *Witnesses* of the Truth, who stood boldly in *the Gap*, and opposed the Errors and Corruptions of the Church of Rome with great Strength of Reason, as well as Courage and Magnanimity.---- Due Honours have been paid to these illustrious Champions for the Faith, by many Writers, and particularly by the *Bishop of Bristol* in his learned Dissertations upon the Prophecies, Vol. 3d, p. 135 to 183.

I shall only observe, that the *Reformation* was not a sudden Change, the mere Effect of Fortune's Caprice, of any heretical Depravity, or of a Spirit of Faction and Sedition, but the
Beams

Beams of Truth gradually broke in upon the Minds of Men; the Detection of one Error naturally led to that of another, and it was owing to free impartial and disinterested Enquiry, that the whole System of Popery was gradually stripped of its false Disguises, and true Christianity was happily restored to its original Purity and Simplicity.

S E C T. VI.

The Reformation, a happy Means of Deliverance from the Errors and Corruptions of the Church of Rome, but not without its Blemishes.

THE *Reformation* is one of the most interesting Events in the History of Mankind.----Its first Effects were weak and feeble, without any other *Weapons* to defend them than those of *Truth*, in Opposition to long established *Customs*, to the deepest *Policy*, and the most formidable Powers of *Europe*. There were, indeed, some Instruments which helped forwards this great *Event*, some previous *Movements*, which naturally led to it; but for a long Time they operated almost by insensible Degrees, and no human Foresight could have thought them adequate to such an important *Revolution* in civil, as well as *Ecclesiastical* Affairs: ^b The *Invention of Printing*, the Revival of *Learning*, and the gradual Extension of all the Arts of *Civi-*

^a An End was put to the Pope's Power in England — A. D.

1534.

^b Between the Years 1420 and 1450.

lization had much enlarged the Minds of Men, roused their passive and legarthick Spirits, awakened in them a Sense of *Freedom*, and emboldened them, not to submit their Investigations to the Tribunal of Magisterial Authority, but to see *with their own Eyes*, and to judge with their own *Understandings*: By these gentle Means, and by the *Translation* of the Scriptures, the Mists of Superstition were in some Measure dispersed, the vain Arts of Sophistry were laid open, the *Cabbala* unveiled, and the *Mystery of Iniquity*, which had cast its sacred *Mantle* over Religion, was found more and more to be a false *Cloke* of *Hypocrisy*. Though the Principles of Protestants had all speculative Advantages on their Side, and *Conviction* was wrought upon many Individuals, yet still there were great Difficulties, which could not be surmounted without the favourable Countenance and Assistance of *secular Authority*: The stern and imperious Spirit of *Henry* the eighth, first broke the *Chains*; the pious Disposition of *Edward* the sixth lightened the *Yoke*; and the steady unrelaxing Temper of *Queen Elizabeth* crowned the *Genius* of *Liberty* with Honour and Success.

The bold and intrepid Conduct of *Luther*, was not to be intimidated by *Papal Menaces*, nor allured by the most specious Promises; His
Theolo-

Theological Theses, and the learned Labours of many *German Divines* had produced their desired Effects, unfettered the Minds and engaged the Affections of some of the *Northern Princes*, and, under their auspicious Influence, and the superior Direction of Providence, the *Reformation* was carried on with rapid and astonishing Progress: An inestimable Blessing this, which as long as *Learning, Liberty* and *Religion* are dear to us, ought always to be considered with the highest Admiration and Gratitude.

But here it may be asked, whether the *Reformation* has entirely wiped off all Stains and Blemishes? Has it raised such Ramparts and Fortifications round the Body of the Church, as to secure it from all Annoyance within, and from all Invasions without? No? It must be owned that Human Nature is still the same; *Perfection* is not the Lot of fallen Man, neither is *Infallibility* the *Adjunct* of *Humanity*.

Though *Protestant Churches* were happily purged from the Innovations and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, yet the over-heated Passions of Men still operated with too much Violence, --- and instead of settling upon one universal *Plan*, in perfect Union and Harmony with each other, they found it difficult to fix the true Boundaries, to agree in the same System

System of Discipline and Worship, and to draw the nice *Line* between *Authority* on the one hand, and religious *Liberty* on the other: Though united in the most essential Parts of Religion, yet they differed too much about the *Fringes* of it, about external Rites and Ceremonies, how far they should deviate from, or adhere to the old *Standard*.

Some pleaded for the *independent Scheme* free from all the Modes of Church-Government, which they considered as *Reliques* of Popery, and arbitrary Infringements upon the Rights and Privileges of Christians.

Others carried their Notions of *Church-Authority* too high, and though they denied the Supremacy of the *Pope*, were for substituting many *Popes* in the diffusive Body of the *Church*.

Others were of a more liberal and candid Disposition, observing a due *Medium* between both Extremes, neither *half-Catholicks*, nor *half-Protestants*, averse to Idolatry, Superstition, and all the slavish Principles of Popery, but sincere Friends to Peace and Unity, to the salutary Rules of Order and Government. They held a stated *Form of Prayer*, as conducive to *Edification* and the *Beauty of Holiness*, but, with a rational and pious Sense of true Devotion,

Devotion, they not only rejected the wild Effusions of *extempore Harangues*, but the formal and fantastical Modes of *Popish Worship*: The *Vestments* of the *Priest*, the *Surplice* and the *Cross* in Baptism they retained, not as absolutely necessary, but only as useful Ceremonies, for the Sake of Order and Decency.

According to this excellent *Model*, the Church of England was formed and established; without the Affectation of *Despotism* on the one hand, or of *levelling* Principles on the other, with Candor, Moderation, and Christian Charity: It is very observable, that *Grotius*, though not a Member of this Church, commended its Doctrine, Discipline and Worship.

It may be said perhaps, that in the opposite *Scale*, there was as great a Weight of Learning, Piety and true Religion, as among the first Compilers of the *Liturgy*; but without drawing a Comparison between them, I shall only observe, that this proves the *Point* in View, and shews, that there always have been various never-ceasing Controversies amongst Christians of all Denomination. * There have been Diffensions, not only between *Lutherans*

* There have been reckoned to be not less than thirty different Sects among the Lutherans.—Jovat. Hist. des Relig.

and *Calvinists*, *Arminians* and *Fatalists*, *Conformists* and *Non-Conformists* *Enthusiasts* and rational Christians; but even within the *Bosom* of our own *Establishment*, the professed Members of our own Communion, have been continually wearying both themselves and others, and have wounded the Sides of Religion by busy and vexatious Disputes of no Consequence: There always will be little *Smatterers* in Divinity, as well as in other Sciences, who, like *Flies*, are continually beaten off, but they return again, and molest us daily. There is too much artificial *Theology* in the World, too many heterogeneous Mixtures, which corrupt the pure and genuine Principles of the Gospel: and, which is another Disgrace to *Protestantism*, it must be owned, that it has not always been free from a Spirit of *Intolerance*, from every Tincture of *Persecution*: The *Engines* of Popery in the Hands of *Protestants*, and towards each other, are high Aggravations of Guilt;---The Punishment inflicted upon *Servetus* will always remain as an indelible Blot upon the Memory of *Calvin*.

The Violence of Rage and Bigotry knows not where to stop; There is a dismal kind of *Fanaticism* incapable of all *Humanity*; These oppressive Measures were often too visible in the early Ages of the Reformation, though

perhaps some tender Allowances might be made to the Zeal of new Converts, to the Prejudices of Education, the *Intolerance* of the *Times*, and the common Treatment of *Hereticks*.

But God be praised, the Laws against Heresy have now taken a milder Turn, and those, which remain, are seldom put in Execution : The *Genius* of Christianity is better understood; and even private Disputes amongst Christians are generally carried on, not only with more logical Propriety, and according to the sober Rules of *Criticism*, but with more Temper and Moderation, with a more liberal, ingenuous and Christian Spirit. It were to be wished, that this might always continue to be the distinguished Glory of *Protestantism* and of true Christianity.

This, though a long Detail, is but an abbreviated Account of the various Opinions, which have disturbed the Peace of the *Church*, and tore the *Body of Christ in Pieces* in all the several Periods of the Gospel : The *Field* of religious Controversy is not only of wide Extent, but full of *Thorns* and *Briers*, and it would be morally impossible to separate all the *Tares* from the *Wheat*,---They must grow together until Harvest.

But the *Sketch* we have given, though it
which

affords no agreeable Prospect, may perhaps be of some Service, *as a Clue*, to lead us through this long *Labyrinth*, this intricate *Maze* of Errors ; or, at least, it may instruct us to avoid the various Turnings and Windings, with which Popery or Infidelity have endeavoured to perplex us ; Truth never shines with greater Beauty than when set in Opposition to Falshood ; and we may perhaps arrive at the long wished for *Haven* with more Ease and Security, by knowing the *Rocks* and *Shelves* upon which others have split, and made *Shipwreck* of the *Faith*.

S E C T. VII.

The Multiplicity of religious Errors no Ground of Objection against the Truth of Christianity.

TRUTH is not a tottering *Fabrick*, easily shaken by the vain Imaginations of Men, but its Foundations are deep and strong as those of Heaven and Earth: Both the internal and external Evidences of Religion are independent of human Opinion; --- if true, they will stand upon their own Basis; if false, their own Weight will crush them.

The Excellency of Scripture-Knowledge, the Sublimity of its Doctrines, the Purity and Simplicity of its Precepts, their happy Congruity with the Laws of Nature, with our moral Sentiments, and with all the fairest Principles, which can lead us, as rational Creatures, to the Enjoyment of true Happiness, these things, abstractedly from human Enquiry, *may be true*, though all Men are *Lyars*; neither the Folly nor Perverseness of Man can change their intrinsic Nature. We may behold in the Scripture Prophecies a long *Chain* commencing from the most early Ages of the World, and reaching down to the final

Consum-

Consummation of all Things, many of them gathering Strength by *Time*, gradually brightening upon us, and opening, as with a *Key*, the various Movements of Providence, towards future Accomplishments ; but when *the Spirit speaketh* so clearly and *expressly*, shall the Veracity of these Predictions be called in Question for no other Reason, than because some are so perverse, that though they have *Ears*, they will not *understand* ?

The Number, Greatness, and benevolent Nature of the *Miracles* wrought in Attestation of the Gospel were the most powerful and convincing Proofs of the *Hand of God* ; They were performed in open View, in a full Concurrence of the People, before *Enemies* as well as *Friends* : but shall these, though real Facts and the most glaring Manifestations of divine Power be absolutely denied, or ascribed to *Magick*, or to the Operation of *evil Spirits*, upon no other Account than because some incredulous Persons would not be persuaded of the Truth, even though *One rose from the Dead* ?

When we consider that regular Harmony and Consistence, that *divine Spirit*, which runs through all the several Parts of the Gospel, and animates the Whole, what a fair Claim has each Note and Character to the Approbation

bation of rational and intelligent Minds? and when taken in a collective View, what additional Strength do they give to each other? But because the highest Degree of *Prabability*, (I may even say of *Demonstration* itself,) will not stamp Conviction upon some Unbelievers, how weak and inconclusive an Argument is this, that there are no sure Investigations of Truth, or no real *Signatures* of it, because the Minds of some are hardened against all *Impressions*?

Such a Train of Reasoning subverts the Nature and Constitution of Things, confounds all Distinction between good and evil, right and wrong, and will be found to terminate in *universal Scepticism*: If we had no other Rule or Standard for our Enquiries than the capricious Whims and Fancies of Men, there would be an End not only of all Religion, but of all *moral* Certainty whatsoever: All would be *Darkness* round us, a blank and visionary *Scene*, a mere *Chaos* of *Absurdities*, without any sure Traces of Unity, Order, Wisdom or Design: This *blind Hypothesis* would bury all our Hopes and Comforts, all the best Attainments of Reason and Knowledge, even the boasted Arguments of Unbelievers themselves, in the same *Grave*; For what Right would the Sceptick have to put on a grave Air of dogmatizing

matizing to Others? Out of his own *Mouth*, he confutes himself; If *Truth* is but a vain *Shadow*, what are the empty *Phantoms* of his own raising? What can his own Wisdom be, but *Foolishness* indeed?

There cannot be a more illogical Deduction in the World than to argue merely from the vague Opinions of Men, in Defiance of all Evidence whatsoever. This was the fallacious Method, which *Celsus* took to depretiate the Gospel-Scheme; he insinuated, that there were so many Sects and Divisions amongst Christians, that the *distracted Multitude condemned themselves*, and had nothing in common with each other, but the Name.^a If the Assertion had been true, it would have been no certain Argument, that the Scriptures were false; And *Origen* gives a very rational and judicious Answer to the Objection, not by denying the *Charge*, but by shewing the Weakness of the *Inference* drawn from it: He tells us, that in *Medicine*,^b even amongst the most skilful Professors of it, there were various *Modes of Prescription*, but that these are no Reasons for totally rejecting the Arts of *Heal-*

^a Ἰπὸ πλήθους πάλιν δι' ἑτέροις σφᾶς αὐτὸς ἐλέγχουσιν, ἕως εἰ-
πεῖν, ἐπὶ κρινόμεντες, εἴ γε κρινάμεν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι. — Origen con-
tra Celsum. p. 118.

^b Ἐπὶ γὰρ ἰατρικῇ χρῆσιμι καὶ ἀναγκαῖα τῷ γένει τῶν ἀνθρώπων,
πολλὰ τε καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ ζητούμενα τὰ τῷ ὄντι.

ing;--- and in *Philosophy*, there are various *Schools*, founded upon a Variety of Principles, those of *Aristotle* in direct Opposition to those of *Plato*: But is *Philosophy* therefore to be discarded as of no *Utility* to Mankind? It is this very *Utility*, says *Origen*, which sets Men at Variance about it. He farther observes, that there were many Divisions amongst the *Jews*, who did not all agree in their Interpretations of the *Laws of Moses and the Prophets*; and from this Induction of similar Instances, he brings the Application home to the *Christian Religion*, which seemed, he says, not only to the mean and *illiterate*, but even to the *learned Græcians*, to carry in it something great and venerable; ^a *Sects* and *Hereses* therefore necessarily sprung up, not through a Spirit of Faction and Sedition, but from an earnest Desire, which prevailed amongst the Learned, of attaining the Knowledge of those Things, upon which the *Christian Religion* chiefly depended.

This was a noble Reply, which carried Reason and a conclusive Force with it; a *Line* is not *strait* or *crooked* according to Men's No-

^a "Οὕτω τίνων, ἐπὶ σμὸν ἢ ἐφάνη τοῖς ἀνθρώποις χριστιανισμὸς ὡς ὁ Κίλως οἶται τοῖς ἀνδραποδετέροις, ἀλλὰ καὶ πολλοῖς τῶν παρ' ἑλλήσι φιλολόγων ἀναγκείως ἐπίστησαν ὁππότεως διὰ τῶν αἰτίων καὶ τὸ φιλονεικεῖν αἰρίσας.

tions of it, but according to its real Nature; and it is a known *Rule* in *Mathematicks*, that a *Proposition* once proved to be true, will remain so at all Times, and in all Circumstances; The Minds of Men may change, but *Faëts* are stubborn Things, and the Characters stamped upon them are indelible.

How weak therefore was the Reasoning of the *Heathen*, if upon no other Account, than because there were *so many Sects amongst Christians*, he made this his most ardent Wish, that *his Soul might be with the Philosophers?* He was ready to upbraid Christianity for the Contrariety of Opinions about it, without considering, how much the several Classes of Philosophers differed in their Sentiments, and were continually waging War with each other.

^a Cum tot sint inter Christianos *Sectæ*, Anima mea sit cum Philosophis.—*Averroes*.

S E C T. VIII.

Errors in Religion no Proof; that the Scriptures are too dark and obscure to be a sufficient Rule of Faith and Manners.

IT must be owned, that, if the sacred Oracles were wrapped up in such dark *Shades of Mystery* as not to be penetrated by human Understanding, this would be a real *Blemish* indeed: For how can it be consistent with the *Wisdom* of the Deity to propose to his Creatures a *Rule of Action* unintelligible and unedifying? Or with the moral Character of Man, to be chained down to a System of Duty, which he has neither *Capacity* to know, nor *Abilities* to perform? But the Gospel is so far from being such a dark Lesson of Instruction, that if *it be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: It is a high-way, and a Wayfaring Man, though a Stranger, shall not err therein.*

It cannot be said, that the *Historical* Parts of Scripture are entangled with many Difficulties; They are plain and easy *Narratives*, embellished with all the most agreeable Ornaments of *Brevity, Simplicity, and Perspicuity.*

The *moral and perceptive* Parts address themselves to our Affections, as well as our Understandings;

standings; and are recommended to us, not in a formal *didactic* Strain, but in the most affecting and engaging Terms, with a vast Variety of Beauty here and there interspersed as in the wide *Field of Nature*.

We are told indeed by some, that the speculative Doctrines of our Religion do not admit of an easy Explication, and the more Men have studied to unravel these mysterious Truths, the more they are lost and bewildered in their Opinions: But what sublime and exalted, what beautiful and consistent Representations of the Deity are exhibited to us in the Scriptures, and sometimes in a *Poetical Dress*,^a with Dignity and Majesty, beyond the utmost Stretch of human Imagination only! Even the *Babe in Christ* has a truer Knowledge of God, and of his divine Perfections, than the most enlightened Philosophers among the *Heathens*.

^a This Objection concerning the *Obscurity* of the Scriptures Mr. Hume has shifted off from himself and artfully put into the Mouths of others.—But he dwells so long upon it, as plainly shews it to be a favorite Sentiment of his own: Amongst other Things, he observes, that *sacred Writ itself was involved in so much Obscurity, was exposed to so many Difficulties, contained so many appearing Contradictions, that it was the most dangerous Weapon, which could be intrusted into the Hands of the ignorant and giddy Multitude.—That the Poetical Spirit, in which a great Part of it was composed, at the same Time that it occasioned Uncertainty in the Sense by its multiplied Tropes and Figures, was sufficient to kindle the Zeal of Fanaticism, and thereby throw civil Society into the most furious Combustion.*—See his Life of Henry the 8th, p. 201, 202.

Many Disputes indeed have arose from these speculative Points; but how often do they proceed from metaphysical Subtleties of Men's own devising? If there are any real Difficulties beyond the Line of Man's Understanding, they don't arise from a Defect in the Gospel-System; but they are such, as were not intended to be fully revealed; or the *Obscurity* proceeds from no other Cause but the Grandeur and Sublimity of the Subject.

Some of the Scripture Prophecies, especially those, which are not yet fulfilled, may be involved in *Darkness*; but no farther than the Nature of such prophetical Anticipations necessarily require. The *Symbols*, under which they are represented, are striking and emphatical, The *Figures* and Allusions are so pointing, and apposite to the Subject, that one Prediction is often a Key to the right Understanding of another; and though it be granted, that some of them may be *sealed* under the Cover of Mystery,---The Concatenation of *Causes* and *Effects* may be hidden from us, and may often puzzle our best Enquiries, but there may be many wise Reasons for these wonderful Counsels of God, though beyond the Sphere of human Knowledge; The divine Oeconomy will gradually unfold itself, and the whole progressive Scheme will

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will shine more and more till the great Day of *Consummation*. If in the vast *Machinery* of the *World*, the secret Springs of Providence were more open to our View, what daring Attempts might be formed, to interrupt the *Wheels*, to cross and counteract the principal Movements, and, instead of Order and Regularity, to create Confusion? It is well-known, that such was the Subtlety and Impiety of the *Apostate Julian*; ^a But how vain and ineffectual are the wisest Stratagems of Men against the Will and Power of the Almighty? Though the divine *Predictions* may for some Ages perhaps be wrapped up and concealed in the dark *Womb* of Time, yet the unexpected Event will throw such a *Blaze of Evidence* upon them, as will much redound to the Glory of God, who ruleth over all the *Kingdoms of Men*, and *bringeth great and mighty Things to pass*.

We are told indeed that in the *epistolary* Writings of the Apostles, there are many Passages hard to be understood; But what are these? They are chiefly of a *Controversial* Nature, such as had an immediate Relation only to the *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and in which the

^a See Bishop Warburton's learned Discourse concerning the *Earthquake* and *Fiery Eruption*, which defeated Julian's Attempt to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem.

moral Conduct of Christians was by no means concerned: The local and *sacrificial* Terms alluding to various *Customs, Dialects* and *Figures*, then in common Use, might appear to them, to whom they were occasionally addressed with great Clearness, Elegance, and Importance; But to other Professors of the Gospel, who lived in distant Ages of the World, they might be of little Moment; and from their not having a full Knowledge of them, no Inconvenience might arise, which could affect either their present or future Happiness.

I shall only observe, that the sacred Oracles contain in them all *Things necessary to Salvation*, and these are set before us in a Light so strong and irresistible, that there is by no means any Want of the false Subsidiary Aids, which the Church of Rome has grafted upon them, and which are only the vain, fictitious, unnecessary Supplements of human Invention.

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S E C T. IX.

Errors in Religion no Proofs of the absolute Necessity of a supreme Judge, or infallible Interpreter in religious Controversies.

THE Church of Rome appropriates to herself many great and singular Advantages above all other Churches, by which she arrogates to herself a Right of *Dominion* over the Faith and Consciences of Men, and *lords* it over the *Heritage of God*: She pronounces all who are not within her own *Pale* to be no other than *Hereticks* and *Schismaticks*, and pretends to an exclusive Power of debarring them from all Possibility of *Salvation*: But her own *Votaries* she places in a secure impregnable *Harbour*, out of the Reach of Error, in the *Arms* of Infallibility in this World, and in the *Bosom* of *Abraham* in the World to come.

What a compendious Road to Truth and Happiness is this? What *Winds* can disturb, or what *Waves* molest, a Hierarchy built upon such a *Rock*, and so well fortified against all Dangers and Difficulties?

But, upon what *Basis* does all this boasted Confidence stand? What has this lofty Edifice

fice to support it, but a vain Presumption, that without these glorious Privileges, all must fall to the Ground: The *Glory* and *Splendor* of the visible Church (which Bellarmine makes a distinguishing *Note* of her Truth and Excellence) could not be preserved, unless sheltered under the *Wings* of a Supreme Judge or infallible *Interpreter* of the Word of God.

But what is this, but drawing a *Picture* with every Beauty and Ornament, which Art can give, and then fancying with a wonderful Force of Imagination, that it has a natural Likeness to the most ill-favoured *Original*? Might not every Community of Christians pay the same Compliment to itself, and say, that these Advantages must necessarily be granted by God, because without them, they could not flourish with proper Dignity and *Grandeur*?

It is easy to see the Weakness of this Argument. If it proves any Thing, it proves too much; it arraigns the Wisdom and Justice of God, by supposing that the standing Rule and Measure of the divine Oeconomy must be formed according to the several Wants and Exigencies of his Creatures: Might We not as justly argue, that we ought to be guarded against the Power and Influence of *Sin* as well as *Error*; that there ought to be no Alloy in the
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the human Constitution, no Temptation to Evil, nor Possibility of Seduction, --- no Corruptions of the *Heart* as well as the *Understanding*?

And indeed, in civil as well as religious Controversies, great might be the Utility of an infallible *Arbitrator*: Under a Sovereign and unerring *Tribunal*, the *Scales* of Justice would be held with an equal Hand, and could not preponderate on the wrong Side, in Favour of Falshood and Iniquity: But does it follow from hence, that all judicial Proceedings must always be founded upon Equity and Righteousness?

Does it become Man, or any Assembly or Succession of Men, however dignified or distinguished, to prescribe Laws to their Maker? or to new-model the Constitution of Things according to their capricious Notions of *Fitness* or *Unfitness*? If our Ideas of Expedience were made the Standard of divine Administrations, how often would the System of Nature be unhinged? How would the Schemes of Providence be forced to vary, like *Man* himself, who is ever shifting from *Point* to *Point*, and *tossed to and fro with every Wind of Doctrine*?

We are told indeed with a very positive Air,
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that the *true Church* cannot err ; but this is begging the *Question* ; and infers no more than that the *Church*, while it is in the *Right*, cannot be in the *Wrong*.

But where are the Specimens of this pretended Infallibility? What unerring Comments upon the Scriptures have been produced?^a Even the *Latin vulgate Bible* is full of the grossest Errors and Mistakes, though declared authentick and canonized by the *Council of Trent* ; corrected by one *Pope*,^b and revised by another :^c So many are the Corruptions of this holy Catholick Church, that she is self-condemned, her own Frauds and Impostures retort upon her, and loudly refute her high Claim to an infallible Spirit : If we judge from *Facts*, her pretended *Unity* is but a Heap of Contradictions. Dissentions and Divisions have been so multiplied amongst the professed Members of this as well as other Communions, that there is no uninterrupted Harmony of Sentiments amongst them, of which the still undecided Controversies between the *Jansenists* and *Molinists* are flagrant Proofs.

^a A. D. 15.

^b Pope Sixtus.

^c Clement A. D. 1592.

If we ask, where the supreme infallible Authority is lodged? Is it in the *Pope*, the *Councils* or the diffusive Body of the Church? This is a *Knot* hard to be untied; The Seat of this infallible *Determiner* is not yet absolutely *determined*: It has no real *Existence*, except where it first began, in the *Imagination* only.

S E C T. X.

Errors in Religion not inconsistent with the Promises of Scripture, but truly agreeable to the express Declarations of it.

TO put the *Crown of Infallibility* upon her Head, the *Church of Rome* has been wanting in no Pains nor Artifices: She knows, that this Dignity, if once secured, must gain the *Palm of Victory* at once, and exalt her *Ecclesiastical Kingdom* above all other Kingdoms upon Earth.

With this View, she pretends to derive her *Charter* from the *Broad-Seal* of Heaven itself. --- How often are we told, that the Scriptures themselves declare, that the *Church* is the *Pillar and Ground of Truth*, that all the *Powers of Darkneſs*, even the *Gates of Hell* itself, shall not prevail against her, and that *Christ* will be always with her, even to the *Ends of the World*? These indeed are the Promises of the Gospel, and will to all true Christians, be *their Hope, their Joy, their Crown of Rejoicing*.

But what *Right* has the *Church of Rome* to appropriate these Blessings to herself, in Preference to all other *Churches*? She is only a
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Branch, (and a very corrupt one too) of the *Universal Church of Christ*.

The *Promises* are general and indefinite, not given to one particular Community of Christians, but to the whole collective Body, --- to the *Catholick Church* indiscriminately. And indeed they ought to be understood with some peculiar Restrictions, not as implying an absolute indefectible Security against all Errors whatsoever, but a general Preservation of the Gospel in all Ages, and in Defiance of all its Enemies.

We know, that particular *Churches* may fail; the *Jewish Church*, the seven mentioned by St. *John*, and many others, both in the *East* and *West*, are now no more: *their Candlesticks are removed*; and that of *Rome* may possibly share the same Fate. That *hereditary, indefeasible, and unalienable Right*, which is challenged with such an imperious Claim, may be given to other *Heirs of the Vineyard*.

The multiplied Errors and Corruptions of this, or indeed of any other particular Society of Christians, are so far from being inconsistent with the *Evangelical Promises*, that they were expressly foretold both by *Christ* and his *Apostles*. It is *impossible*, said our Saviour to his Disciples, but *that Offences will come*.

“ *Such,*

“ *Such, says a learned Paraphrast, ^a is the State of Things, and the Wickedness of Men, that it is morally impossible, but Offences will come; It must needs happen, that Schisms and Divisions, Factions and false Doctrines, Contentions and Persecutions will arise, whereby humble and well meaning Christians may be seduced, or terrified from the Practice of their Duty; and it is not agreeable to the Wisdom or Designs of Providence in his Government of this present World to hinder these Things by the continual Interposition of his extraordinary and miraculous Power.*”

The Kingdom of Heaven is by a very apt Similitude compared to a Net, cast into the Sea, which gathereth of every Kind, Mat. xiii. 47. or to a Field, where the Tares and Corn grow up together: In a great House, says St. Paul, meaning the Church of the living God, there are not only Vessels of Gold and of Silver, but also of Wood and of Earth,^b and some to Honour, and some to Dishonour. And the same Apostle, when he heard of the unhappy Divisions in the Church of Corinth, was so far from considering them as uncommon and unexpected Events, that he not only signified his ready Belief of them, but pointed out a peculiar

^a Dr. Clarke upon Luke the 17th, v. 1.

^b 2 Tim. c. 2. v. 20.

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Advantage arising from them; *There must*, says he, ^a *be Heresies amongst you, that They, which are approved, may be made manifest, that the Virtues of true Believers may shine with the more distinguished Lustre.*

By the wise Direction of Providence, *Good* is often extracted out of *Evil*; and what can more adorn the Triumphs of *Truth* than its Contrast with *Falshood*? How many excellent *Vindications* of the Christian Faith have entirely owed their Birth to the false Cavils and Objections of Unbelievers? As in the natural World, *Storms and Tempests fulfil the Word of God*, so in the moral System, the *Fierceness of Man*, O Lord, *shall turn to thy Praise*, and the *Fierceness of them shalt thou restrain.*

It may indeed be said, that if the Church of Christ was *pure and undefiled* in all its Parts, free from all the Evils of *Heresy, Schism, Faction and Sedition*, without *Spot or Wrinkle* or any *such Thing*, it would be a *glorious Church* indeed, resembling that *heavenly Jerusalem*, the *holy City of God*; but the *Scriptures* consider Men, as they really are, according to the genuine Frame and Constitution of Nature: They neither depreciate its Dignity, nor set it off with false and artificial Colourings.

^a 1 Cor. 11. 19.

Since therefore a Diversity of Opinions is as natural to Man, as a Difference of Complexion, and the sacred Oracles instead of hiding these Blemishes forewarns us of them, as *the common Lot of Mankind*, what can be a higher Pitch of Arrogance and Presumption than for any Church to monopolize to itself all Purity and Perfection, and to exalt itself not only above human Nature, but above all that is *called God*? How much better would it become a *Church*, which is itself overspread with Idolatry and Superstition, to cleanse and purify herself from her *own Filthiness*, than to brand the Professors of other Communions with the odious Names of *Hereticks* and *Schismatics*, for no other Reason, than because they will not yield a blind implicit Obedience to to the usurped Authority of *the See of Rome*, to that domineering Spirit of *Infallibility*, which, though the main Support of the whole *Fabrick of Popery*, is really built upon the Ruins of Common Sense as well as Religion?

S E C T. XI.

Errors in Religion no Argument, that Protestants have not sufficient Helps for the right Understanding of the Scriptures.

THE blind Votaries of the Church of Rome, like common Soldiers in an Army, follow that long beaten *Track*, which is chalked out for them by their Commanders; but it is the Glory of Protestants, to judge for themselves, and to make the Scriptures their proper Rule of Enquiry, without putting *Oral* and *unwritten Traditions* upon an equal Foot of Authority with them.

Indeed, the *primitive Fathers*, when Heresies sprang up in the Church, were wanting in no Pains to bar the Inlet of all erroneous Opinions; ---They often appealed to *Catholick Tradition*; Its Name was held among them as sacred and venerable; But what are the pretended *Traditions* of the Romanists? only a *Hear-say Evidence* of fallible and fallacious Men, who make themselves *Witnesses* and *Judges* in their own Cause, and set up a Rule above the Scriptures in Support of their own novel Devices; Whereby they *frustrate* the

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Grace,

Grace, and make the Commandments of God of none Effect.

Neither do *Protestants* sacrifice their Reason to the arbitrary Decisions of *Councils*, as well knowing, that these have often contradicted each other, that they are compounded of Individuals, who, as *Men*, are liable to Errors, that they have been often influenced by corrupt Views, and have stamped their publick Seal upon the most absurd and erroneous Opinions.

The *Word of God* is the Protestant Rule of Faith, which stands firmest upon its own Basis; and all *adventitious Props* which have not this for their true Foundation, viz. the *Apostles* and *Prophets*, *Jesus Christ himself* being the chief Corner-Stone, (though they may add to the Heighth and Grandeur of the Building) can give it no real, nor solid Strength.

Upon these Principles, we think it our Duty to shew ourselves Men, to act as rational Creatures, to call no Man Master upon Earth, to stir up the Gift, that is in us, to neglect no natural nor spiritual Means of Edification, and to direct our Enquiries by no false Standards, but by the sacred Oracles of God, which were given by Inspiration, and are profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness, that the Man of God may be
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perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good Works.

2 Ep. to Tim. c. iii. v. 16, 17.

And as the *Door* to all rational Evidence is open to us, we can truly say, that in the Illustration of the Scriptures no Pains have been spared, by copious *Paraphrases*, useful *Comments*, and judicious *Annotations*; The original Languages have been happily explored, the *Idioms*, *Figures* and various *Allusions* have been explained with the greatest Accuracy and Precision; The Sense of *Antiquity*, the Opinions of the *Fathers*, and the Testimony of prophane as well as sacred Writers have been examined and compared: *Parallel Places* have been set before us, and *various Readings*, collated with uncommon Diligence and Fidelity; seeming Contradictions have been reconciled, the Harmony of the several Parts has been clearly pointed out, and ill-grounded Objections answered with great Propriety and Strength of Reason; The most *difficult Passages* have been elucidated, developed from all Perplexity, and the fairest Interpretations have been given according to the most sober Rules of *Criticism*, agreeably to the established Customs and Usages of the Country, or to the Genius, Scope and Intention of the sacred Writers, by a just and collateral View of the *Context*, by *comparing spiritual Things* with

spiritual, the old Testament with the new, and by shewing the regular and uniform Contexture of the Whole, according to the *Analogy of Faith*.

It may be asked perhaps, what do all these Efforts of critical Knowledge and Sagacity avail? The *Romanists* will not allow, that (tho' we *seek for this Pearl of great Price, and dig for it as for hid Treasures*) we shall be ever able to *find* it, unless we are guided by that *Clue* of Infallibility, or rather Absurdity, which they, in Charity to our Souls would offer to us: But we have not so *learned Christ*, nor can we give up the Dictates of Reason as well as the sacred Oracles of God, at so easy a Rate, and upon such precarious Terms.

It must indeed be owned, that there have been various Debates and Controversies amongst Christians of all *Denominations, Protestants*, as well as *Papists*; Many Heresies have sprung up within the *Walls* of our own *Sanctuary*; Even *Learning* itself has been sometimes prostituted to base and sinister Designs, and that which ought to be the *Shield* of Truth has been made the unhappy Instrument of evil Opinions: But have there not been heterodox Notions in all Enquiries, and in all Ages whatsoever, even in the Times of the *Apostles*? Has not every *Page* even in the

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Book of Nature as well as in the sacred Volumes been blotted and disfigured with them? There is nothing so absurd, which some minute *Theologians* as well as *Philosophers* have not maintained.

But the *Abuse* of Reason is no Argument against the *Use* of it; We may as well pretend, that *wholesome Food* (because it may be casually corrupted by Poison) does not contribute to the Support and Nourishment of the *Body*, as that the Knowledge of the Scriptures (because they may be defiled by Heretical Opinions) do not contribute to the Health and Preservation of the *Soul*.

In this our *Vineyard*, nothing more *could be done*, than *has been done*: No Care nor Labour has been wanting, there has been no Neglect of *Culture*, that the *good Seed* when *sown* upon *good Ground*, may bring forth *Fruit abundantly*.

Let us not therefore mistake the *Tree*, that bears it: If we *look for Grapes*, and *behold wild Grapes*, whence comes the original Growth of these ill-favoured Productions? It is to be feared, that they are generally rooted in the *Hearts* of Men, the common *Nurseries* of *Ignorance* and *Error*, as well as *Vice* and *Sensuality*.

S E C T. XII.

Errors in Religion no Reason for the Obstruction of Free Enquiry, nor for the Application of Compulsive Measures.

THE *Artillery* of the *Church* of *Rome* is not yet exhausted ; It is with great Policy considered, that Reason and Argument are but *feeble Weapons*, and that when employed in the Cause of *Falshood*, they often blunt their own *Edge*; but *Anathemas*, *Depositions*, *Confiscations*, *Bulls* of *Excommunication*, and all the sanguinary Measures of *Persecution*, especially that formidable Tribunal the *Inquisition*, are of a more operative and irresistible Nature, a much more decisive Method to subdue the rebellious Spirits of Men, and to command Obedience, than the slow and tedious Process of *Argumentation* which seldom works *Conviction*, or if it does, it is but by halves and by gentle Degrees.

If therefore all the *Volumes* in the *Vatican* cannot prove the Tenets of *Popery*, its *Thunder* can do more ; This is thought to be a never-failing *Buttress*, which can stand against the strongest Efforts of Truth, and the most daring Insolence of free Enquiry.

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When a Church is so defiled with Errors and Corruptions in its Doctrine and Worship, and founded upon such arbitrary, tyrannical and unchristian Principles, a *Separation* from it is certainly justifiable, and is so far from deserving the Title of *Schism*, that it is a necessary Act of Obedience to *God*, rather than *Man*. Notwithstanding the secret Whispers of *Peace*, or the loud Calls of Order, Unity or any Spiritual Jurisdiction whatsoever, the *Voice* of *Truth* is sacred above all, and ought to have a powerful Efficacy in herself alone to engage the Attention of all rational Creatures.

The Use of private Judgment is our *Birth-right*, to which all have an equal Claim: There is no *Charter* more antient than that of religious Liberty; It is coæval with Religion; and not only Reason gives a Sanction to it, but it is sealed by the divine Authority of God himself; This is that peculiar Blessing, which the Gospel has bestowed upon us, that *Liberty*, wherewith *Christ* has *made us free*; by which we are to understand, not a licentious Freedom of trampling upon any sacred Laws, either of human or divine Appointment, but a sober, sincere, and dispassionate Desire of finding the right Path, and of walking in it according to the best Direction of our own Consciences: And if we
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have a right of judging for ourselves, it must be allowed, that all Attempts to rob us of this inestimable Blessing by Force and Violence, is Tyranny and Despotism, the *Gall of Bitterness*, and the *Bond of Iniquity*.

Let us now reflect but one Moment upon former Times, upon the Racks and Tortures and upon all the Horrors of Persecution, which Christians suffered under the *Heathen Emperors*, how does common Humanity shudder at this Reflection?

Indeed when Christianity was established, it tended much to humanize the Tempers of Men and to soften their Principles with Candor and Moderation; Some of the most zealous *Gentiles*, who lived in the Times of the first *Christian Emperors*, were not only allowed the Freedom of private Sentiment, but were admitted into civil Offices of the highest Trust and Honour; Some had the Privilege of teaching the *polite Arts*, and of carrying on their learned Lectures upon Philosophy, with much Honour and Applause; and we don't find, that either *Porphry* or *Proclus*, though the bitterest Enemies of the *Gospel*, sustained any Injury in their Persons from the unjust and malicious Aspersions, which they cast upon all Christians.

But even these *Times* were blackened with various Instances of Severity and Cruelty.

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Constantine himself did not strictly adhere to the *Edict*, which was published by him and *Licinius*.^a Under the Sons of *Constantine*, some severer Laws were enacted, and in the *Theodosian Code*, we find, that Sacrifices were absolutely forbid under the Penalty of Death itself.

Some of the *Emperors*^b indeed were remarkable for the Lenity of their Government, they afforded to the Pagans the Liberty of enjoying their own Rites, their Temples, and the Solemnities belonging to them; but if we step a little lower to the Times of ^c*Theodosius*, *Persecution* lifted up its Standard with great Severity, and indeed the same unchristian Spirit seldom rested till the entire overthrow of *Paganism*. What Pity is it, that Christianity should be stained with such Blemishes, so contrary to its Genius and Temper, to the Benevolence and Purity of its Doctrines? and much greater Reason have we to lament the Strife and Contention, the many Factions and Divisions, which have continually disturbed the Peace of the Christian Church, strictly verifying the Words of the Prophet, and of Christ

^a A. D. 313.

^b Jovian, Valentinian, Valens.

^c 381.

himself, that a Man's *Enemies* are *the Men* of *our own Household*?

Happy is it for us, that the present Times are in this, if not in other respects, much meliorated by the kind and benign Influence of that Religion, which is *pure and peaceable, gentle and easy* to be *entreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits, without Partiality and without Hypocrisy*. It is well known, that our *civil Institutions* breath a much softer Spirit than heretofore; and, if some Laws still remain, which may be thought to bear too hard upon the *Consciences* of Men, it may be justly observed, that their *Edge* is in a great Measure taken off by their being seldom put in Execution: The *Toleration-Act* is the Basis of religious Freedom, and may not improperly be called the *chief-Corner-Stone* in the *Temple of Liberty*: By this wise Institution, they who differ from us in Opinion, are happily exempted, not only from the *Penalty*, but the *Crime* of *Non-Conformity*: *Publick Wisdom* looks down upon them rather with the *Smiles* than the *Frowns* of its Countenance.

I shall only observe that *Compulsion*,^a considered only as a *Political Engine*, is a *Weapon*

^a Non est opus Vi et Injuriâ; Quia Religio cogi non potest; Verbis potius quàm Verberibus res agenda est, ut sit Voluntas. Lactant. Lib. 5. p. 478.

by no Means adapted for the Support of Speculative Opinions ; The *Consciences* of Men are not amenable to human Tribunals, which may indeed controul their outward Actions, and may possibly make them *Hypocrites*, but no outward Force and Violence can change the inward Principles of the Heart, or stamp *Impressions* upon it contrary to its own *Convictions*.

The Schemes of Persecution never can be justified for the *Fear* of *Consequences*, nor sanctified by any holy Pretences whatsoever. Necessity indeed has been often pleaded ; --- Either the private Edification of Christians, or the publick Honour of an *established System* has been often urged, especially by the Church of Rome, as Reasons for the Exertion of compulsive Measures, but that *Hierarchy*, which has such *Pillars* to support it, though adorned with all the outward Ornaments of Splendor and Magnificence, must stand upon a false and rotten Foundation, the Ruins of Liberty as well as Religion.

S E C T. XIII.

Errors in Religion no reasonable Causes for impeaching either the Wisdom or Goodness of God, or the moral Excellence of Human Nature.

IF Men were always bewildered in an inextricable *Labyrinth*, and had no *Clue*, by which they might direct their Steps through the various Mazes of Error, this would be a dark and melancholy State indeed, that of mere Animals without Understanding, without any rational Grounds of Hope or Comfort.

But the great Author of our Being has not left us without *Witness*, neither is it any Reflection upon his moral Character, that we are not endowed with absolute and unerring Perfection; This would be above the Condition of created Beings, and by no means consistent with a State of *Trial* and *Discipline*. The very Idea of a *probationary* State implies a *Freedom* of Will, a voluntary *Choice* of the rational Means of Conviction; and when well-directed, a *Free Assent* to the Evidence of Truth: If our Faculties were chained down by *Fate*, or determined by mere Necessity, what Merit could

could there be in judging *right*, or what Demerit in judging *wrong*? What would be the whole Frame of Man, but a Piece of *Mechanism*, bound to act as its Maker pleases, and governed only by artificial Springs, without any moral or self-moving Principle?

But here the Wisdom and Goodness of God are displayed, not less in the intellectual System, than in the natural, not less in the inward Constitution of Man, than in the outward Beauty and Harmony, which are visible in the Things of this World: Though all are liable to Errors, and many may be given up to *strong Delusions* to believe a *Lie*, yet it cannot be said, that the divine Oeconomy bears any blameable Part in these Imperfections, which will appear if we consider the superior Excellence of Man above all other sublunary Beings! We are *formed after the Image of God himself*, with the fairest Principles of Nature, the most kind instinctive Impressions, with a moral Sense and Love of Truth, and with Faculties so congenial to our Duty, that, if no Prejudice perverts our Judgment of Things, we cannot behold the attracting Charms of Virtue without Admiration: We are not only capable of discerning the Relations and Fittestnesses of Things, but at first View, they engage our Affections, and so happily coincide with our Nature,

Nature, as we are rational Creatures, that the internal Principle of Conscience, as a *Light*, a *Witness* and a *Judge*, gives a Sanction to all our moral Obligations.

When we turn our Thoughts towards the excellent Gifts and Endowments of the Mind, how much is the *dark Side* of our Constitution enlivened? When human Nature is weighed in a fair *Scale*, and the rational as well as animal Powers are justly ballanced one against the other, upon a due *Poise*, how much greater Reason have we to admire than to lament the Situation we are in? to adore the Wisdom and Goodness of the great Parent of Mankind rather than to repine at any Disorders and Defects, which are necessarily inherent in our Frame and Constitution?

Some indeed are apt to indulge their gloomy Imaginations too much, and to paint human Nature in the blackest Colours, with all the hideous Marks of Ignorance and Deformity, as though we were doomed by an unavoidable and irresistible Decree to grope in Darkness without a *Guide*, or any sure Grounds of Consolation; but how little do they understand of the genuine Beauty and Dignity of the human Mind? which may indeed be distorted into many ugly Features and Resemblances, but in its true Original, (as it comes out of our Maker's

ker's Hands) it is fair and lovely, *little lower than the Angels themselves*; God has made Man upright, but they have sought out many Inventions.

With regard to the divine Being, we cannot indeed find out the Almighty to Perfection; but by a proper Exercise of Reason, we are able to form our Ideas, and to raise our Thoughts from the *Effects* to the supreme Cause, and though we cannot discover all the intermediate Ties of Connexion, yet we know by the most clear and undeniable Evidence, that there must be one supreme unoriginated Cause of all Things, a necessary, self-existent and independent Being.

Indeed many intricate Ways of Providence are beyond the Sphere of human Comprehension; Such *Knowledge is too wonderful for us*, we cannot attain unto it; but notwithstanding these Infirmities, we are capable of discerning many visible Footsteps of Harmony and Design, many Traces of infinite Wisdom, Goodness and Power within, as well as without us, throughout the whole System of Nature; and these Reflexions, these happy Discoveries, it is in our own Power to apply, and to draw just and reasonable Conclusions from them, to the Improvement of Virtue, to the Honour of Religion, and to the Praise and Glory of God.

S E C T. XIV.

The Conclusion with Inferences from the whole.

THE many wild and heterodox Opinions, which have disgraced human Reason, defiled the Purity of the Gospel, and disturbed the Peace of the Christian Church, may afford us a very useful Lesson of Instruction, and like Poison, when corrected, may become a very salutary *Medicine*: The more erroneous Principles abound, the more ought we to walk *circumspectly*, not as *Fools*, but as *wise*. Amidst so many controverted Points and such multiplied Divisions amongst Men, it ought to be our first and greatest Concern, to *search* the *Scriptures*, as the *Beræans* did, with Diligence and Impartiality, that we may be able to attain a right Understanding of those pure and incorrupt Fountains of Truth and Knowledge.

Indeed from this sacred Original the Romanists themselves pretend to derive most of their peculiar Doctrines, but they are too apt to handle the *Word of God* *deceitfully*, and instead of founding their Church upon the Authority of the Scriptures, they make the Scriptures subservient to the Interest of the *Church*;
Sometimes

Sometimes they make use of all their critical Sagacity, or rather their Jesuitical Sophistry either to put a literal Construction upon figurative and metaphorical Expressions, or at other Times to allegorize the *Letter*, and to hide the most plain and obvious Truths under the dark veil of Mystery.

The same Artifices are too often made use of by Unbelievers, who twist and torture the sacred Oracles, with no other View than to find out *Blemishes* instead of *Beauties*, to invent Contradictions without any Regard to the Analogy of Faith, and to set the vain Reasonings of Men, above the Wisdom of God himself. When these perverse *Disputers* are armed with a few trifling Objections, with what Pride do they march into the Field of Controversy, dispute boldly and outbrave the Truth with daring Insolence and Impiety? What are these high Boastings, but *like Waters running apace*, which owe their Roughness and Rapidity, not to their *Depth* but *Shallowness*? and how often do we find that none but *Straws* can swim upon the *Surface*?

But true Scripture Knowledge, like the Fountain from whence it springs, is deep and clear, as well as calm and serene; *Out of its Belly shall flow Rivers of living Water*, and he, that *drinketh*, shall never thirst. --- *John vii. 38.*

2^{ly}, The Multiplicity of Errors, which have infested the Church in all the several Ages of the Gospel, though generally arising from too much *Levity*, or Perverseness of Spirit, may sometimes be considered in a more favorable Light, as not so much the Issues of a depraved Will, as of a weak and misguided *Understanding*: In such Cases, where there are no Symptoms of heretical Depravity, there is certainly Room for Lenity and Indulgence: We shall always find, that Gentleness, Candor, and the tender softenings of Christian Charity, are the most likely Means of recommending Truth, and of *putting to Silence the Ignorance of foolish Men*.

But when a Man's Principles are stiffened with Self-Conceit and Bigotry, the best Arguments will lose much of their Force. The proud *Orthodoxy*, which despises others, will be always held in *Contempt*; that narrow *Rigidity* of Spirit, which never looks with a tender Eye upon the Errors and Failings of other Men, is neither becoming the *Character* of the *Gentlemen*, the *Scholar*, or the Christian; It is contrary to that *Elegance* and Delicacy of Manners, which ought to distinguish the *First*, to that liberal Freedom of Enquiry, which the *second* requires in the Prosecution of his own Studies, and to that humane, benign and generous

nerous Principle of Love, which is the true Characteristick of a *Christian*.

Of what a different Genius and Complexion is that *Charity*, which beareth all Things, believeth all Things, hopeth all Things, endureth all Things?--- 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

3^{ly}, and lastly, In this Age, when so many erroneous Opinions abound, and are disseminated with so much Zeal both by Popish Emiffaries, and the unhappy Patrons of Infidelity, how much does it concern all, who call themselves Christians, to hold fast the *Form of sound Words*, and to contend earnestly for the *Faith once delivered to the Saints*? If so much Pains are taken in the Cause of *Falshood*, surely, that of *Truth* demands the utmost Efforts of our Care and Affiduity. The Laws of God ought not to be sacrificed to the vain Imaginations of Men, --- to any *Respect* of Persons, --- or to any Views of *secular Interest*; but every Article of the Faith should be preserved inviolate; Every *Yot* and *Tittle* of the *Law* should be adhered to with Truth, Fidelity and Perseverance.

It is the Glory of *Protestants*, to receive from the Hands of their Ancestors the *Bible pure and undefiled*; but if they abuse this sacred *Deposit*; if they swerve from the *Faith*, and apostatize from their Religion, how shall
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they *escape*, if they *neglect* so great *Salvation*? What will a *Reformation* from *Ropery* avail them, if they are *unreformed* in other Points, and run into other Errors no less injurious to the true Interest of the Gospel? It was the boasted Plea of the Emperor *Julian*,^a (when with great Art and Subtlety he addressed himself to the *Alexandrians*) that he himself till twenty Years of Age, had been bred up in the Principles of Christianity; but this was an *Argument*, which highly aggravated his Crime, and hereby he signed his Condemnation with his own Hand; And the same may be said of *Protestants* in a more especial Manner, if they desert the Truth, and do not *hold fast* the *Profession of their Faith without wavering*; how is their Guilt enhanced beyond all Excuse? What *Cloke* can they have for a *Sin so exceeding sinful*?

The true Protestant, if he would act in Conformity to that most desirable Character, will be so far from having any Tincture of an hæretical or schismatical Spirit, that he will be steady in his Pursuits of Truth, and particularly careful to *follow the Things, which make for Peace*: He will pay indeed a due Regard to Antiquity, to the Opinions of the Learned, to the publick Wisdom of that *Community*, of

^a Julian Ep. 51. p. 432.

which

which he is a Member, and to the private Instructions of good and sincere Christians ; but under just and reasonable Restrictions only : He will not sacrifice his *Liberty*, or give up his *Faith* blindly and implicitly with a supine Obedience to human Authority, but so far only as is consistent with Reason, guided and directed by the sacred Oracles of God ; and the same liberal and ingenuous Enquiry into the Truths of Religion, which he challenges to himself, he will be as ready to grant to other Christians ; he will neither submit to any lordly Dominion over his own Conscience, nor will he frame *Fetters* for the Understanding and Consciences of other Men.

I shall conclude the whole with the last Words of a famous Lutheran Divine, ^a *I desire, says he, to die under Jesus Christ, Head of the Church, in the true Catholick Faith, in the Love of all, that serve and love God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I will not condemn any, that err in unnecessary Truths, and hope, God will pardon me, if I have committed Errors of this Nature.*

^a *Calixtus* born 1562 in *Holstein* at *Medelburgh*.

